

Good Enough

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Drama, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Astrid, Hiccup

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2014-07-14 12:41:28

Updated: 2014-08-17 12:11:56

Packaged: 2016-04-26 19:53:13

Rating: T

Chapters: 13

Words: 21,215

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: "I know you still love me â€" but we can't escape the fact that I'm just not enough for you!" The village council has decided that it's time â€" Time for their chief to finally marry. The village council pushes for the bride to come from the neighbouring tribe - Needless to say this doesn't go down well with the chiefâ€| or the beautiful blonde Viking he's been courting. Hiccstrid

## 1. Chapter 1

The morning started off very standard for Berk. The sheep were grazing, the chickens were laying, and the villagers were working. The occasional dragon was causing a ruckus and Hiccup, as usual, was on his morning rounds cleaning up the mess. It could be tiring at times. Of course, there was a fun side to it. And that fun side was trailing behind him on her Deadly Natter, stifling a snigger behind her hand as a stray Monstrous Nightmare sneezed and set fire to a random roof within the village. Hiccup had extinguished it and successfully (although not without effort) calmed down the residents. He'd turned to Astrid after the commotion had died down to see her trying to hide the grin on her face. He gave her a lopsided smile and shook his head. Astrid straightened and gave an innocent smile.

"What?" His eyebrow shot up humorously.

"Unbelievable"

"What is?"

"That you find my pain funny"

"Actually" Astrid corrected, holding up a hand, her index finger pointing up towards the heavens as she made her point "I I find \_their\_ pain funny. Yours is \_hilarious\_"

"Ha ha" Hiccup said, taking a step towards her "Veeeerry funny" he grabbed her suddenly by the waist and pulled her close enough that they bumped noses "Come here you".

He didn't even get a moment to sneak a kiss before Valka's voice cut through, making the pair jump.

"Hiccup" Astrid made to pull away, yet Hiccup held tight, keeping her close, grinning over her shoulder at his mother. His smile wavered however, when he saw her face and concern overtook him.

"Hey æ" mum. W-what's wrong?" Astrid turned, able to shake his arms off her in his distracted state. Valka looked uncomfortable as she approached, playing with her hair as she neared the two.

"The council have called a meeting Hiccup" she explained, not entirely meeting his gaze "They're requesting your presence". Hiccup frowned.

"Meeting? I was never told about a meeting-"

"It was rather sudden, I'm afraid, son" Valka explained in a rush "But I really must insist that you go. Now". Astrid tensed, sensing something was wrong. Hiccup did also, and step around Astrid, his arms held out at his sides as his frown deepened.

"Well, what's the meeting abo-"

"Just come, Hiccup" Valka snapped, surprising all three of them. Her eyes widened and she took a deep breath, offering an apologetic smile and an outstretched hand "Please, son. I think it'll be quite important"

Hiccup gave a confused laugh, and looked at Astrid with what seemed to be an annoyed shrug.

"Shall we then?"

"Uh, no Hiccup" Valka interrupted, stepping forward and grabbing his shoulder, "I'm afraid that this is a closed meeting". Hiccup narrowed his eyes at his mother, totally at a loss as to what was going on. After a moment and an insistent look from his mother, he gave a disbelieving laugh and looked at Astrid in apology.

"Shall I stop by later?"

"That'd be good" Astrid replied, her gaze swinging between her boyfriend and his mother in concerned confusion. She offered him a weak smile. "I'll see you then" She barely given him a peck on the cheek before his mother grabbed his hand and trotted him off. Astrid gave them one last confused look before her attention was caught by a villager's yell

"ANOTHER fire! Darned Monstrous Nightmares!".

## 2. Chapter 2

"Our meeting is called to order" Called Gobber, glancing around the round formation of the village council. It included the wisest, the

strongest and the most influential of all the Vikings in Berk. Hiccup looked around the circle, arms folded. He saw Spitelout Jorgenson, Snotlout's father, Phlegma the Fierce, one of the most influential of all the female Vikings, Gothi, the village magic woman, Gobber, his mother, Daemon Thorkins, the advisor for inter-tribal relations, Phleck Norton, the keeper of the village records and histories, and last, but certainly not the least noticed by Hiccup, Gleb Hofferson—Astrid's father. Gobber cleared his throat, "Now, I will begin with reading the last minutes of the meeting—"

"Ack! We've not time for dribble such as tha' Gobber!" Phleck interrupted, waving his hand in emphasis "We should just get straight to th'point!". Hiccup raised an eyebrow. For a record keeper to want to skip minutes, something must be up.

"I agree" Phlegma replied, nodding and looking directly at Hiccup "We've no need to go ov'r the last meeting. Particularly under th'circumstances—"

"Which I am still blissfully unaware of" Hiccup intruded sarcastically, tapping an impatient finger on his arm "What exactly is going on that's so urgent?"

Gobber rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, looking everywhere but at him.

"Y'see Hiccup" he began slowly, "There's been a bit of talk goin' on. In regards te â€" well! â€" circumstances that they are â€" the council have been wondering â€" more like wantn' to ask ye—"

"Enough with yer stammerin' Gobber!" Spitelout cut him off with his drawled, oafish voice "Lets not beat 'round the issue 'ere" He turned to look Hiccup directly in the eye. "We're here to discuss your future Hiccup"

"My \_future\_?" Hiccup repeated, confused "You lost me"

"You see son" Valka but in with a narrowed glare cast in Spitelout's direction "There comes a time in a everyone's life where certain milestones are reached.. and seeing that you're now.. moreso that you've now inheristed—"

"—Now you're the chief" Daemon cut off impatiently. Valka glared at him now.

"Would you all just wait a moment please!" Valka hissed "I'm trying to explain the situation delicately!"

"And you're all failing miserably" Gleb muttered. Everyone turned to look at him. He looked at no one for a while, staring, it seemed, at an open space in the center of them all. Then, he raised his gaze. To meet Hiccup's. He looked dismal, and suddenly Hiccup felt dread wash over him. For the great Gleb Hofferson to be touched, something \_must\_ be wrong.

"What's going on?" Hiccup asked desperately, asking only Gleb, the only one who was making any sense so far. Gleb said nothing for a moment, looking around the table first.

"Will no one be bold enough to tell him?" he asked. They all looked

at each other, and then away. Spitelout huffed.

"I'll tell him then"

"I think not!" Valka snapped.

"Then I guess the honor is all mine" Gleb hissed. He gave a huge sigh, wiping a hand dramatically over his face, pinching the bridge of his nose. His eyes lifted to meet Hiccup's.

"We're here today" he said slowly, speech as clear as crystal "to discuss your betrothal to Joan the Fair, from Skulldale"

"This is a joke right?" Hiccup pleaded "You cannot all be serious?"

"It's been settled, Hiccup" Spitelout said, for the hundredth time if felt "We've been in conversation with her father. The chief is keen to strengthen the bond between our tribes"

"As are we" Daemon put emphasis on the word, and spoke as if he were scolding a child for being throwing a tantrum "We are only now awaiting to discuss the terms"

"Terms!" Hiccup yelled, his voice high with alarm "Was I even going to be consulted for any of this?"

"We're telling you now aren't we?" Spitelout rolled his eyes "The time has come to be the man your father prepared you to be"

"My father" Hiccup hisses "would have plotted none of this! Besides! I already have a future here in Berk!"

"The Hifferson girl?" Spitelout laughed. "Don't be childish". Gleb's back went up immediately.

"What?" he snapped "I turn down your son's marriage offer, and all of a sudden my daughter isn't good enough?". Spitelout Shot daggers at him.

"Enough!" Valka called, "This is not how we planned on breaking this to him"

"You KNEW!" Hiccup gasped. Valka froze, turning slowly to look at him with a fearful look. "You knew and didn't say a word!?"

"Hiccup" Valka began in a panic, "It wasn't like that! I wasn't trying to keep anything from-"

"How long?"

"What?"

"How. Long?" he hissed. "I'm not stuttering! How long have you known?"

"Hiccup" Gobber interrupted "Don't speak to our mother like tha' -"

"And you!" Hiccup turned his anger to Gobber now "You're supposed to

be on MY side! You \_love\_ Astrid!"

"I'm afraid that there are things that even I cannot change Hiccup" Gobber explained "This is one of them"

"You're our chief" Phlegma added quietly, "This is your duty"

"And if I refuse?" Hiccup snapped. There was silence. Spitelout's expression stayed the same, but his voice was full of threat.

"Then the treaty is over. The chief wants this marriage. And so do we. It's done Hiccup. Now. Prepare yourself. We leave in a fortnight for Skulldale"

### 3. Chapter 3

He didn't go for Astrid that evening. As the council drifted off, all seeming to feign deafness except Valka who snuck off without being noticed, Gleb pulled Hiccup aside.

"Boy- er" Gleb Hofferson seemingly thought better of his address, "Hiccup, listen.. I understand you are trying to take all of this in, and it has come as quite a shockâ€¦ I would appreciate it if you would leave my daughter me from now"

"What?" Hiccup breathed, "B-but sir-"

"I am adamant, Hiccup" Gleb said sternly "It is for the best I believe. I think it best she hear the news from me. And I would kindly ask you to refrain from speaking to my daughter".

"This isn't fair" Hiccup whispered, tears pricking his eyes, "Sir this isn't fair! I've done nothing but love your daughter-"

"So you would understand why I want her protected" Gleb's voice was kind. Rational, stern, but kind. Hiccup looked at Gleb in distressed shock. He couldn't move or speak from sheer dismay. Gleb sighed and dropped a hand onto Hiccup's shoulder, giving it a strong squeeze, before turning to walk away. After a few paces he halted and called softly over his shoulder, "I- er â€" want you to know son.. thatâ€¦ I was on your side. I was looking forward to making you my son-in-lawâ€¦ Please forgive me. I truly \_was\_ on your side"

Hiccup lie awake in bed, staring at the ceiling. Toothless cooed beside him on the floor. He knew his rider was upset, but he wasn't sure why. He wasn't sick, he smelt fine and other than looking sad, he didn't seem like he was hurt. Confused and worried, Toothless nudged Hiccup's hand, which had been dangling limply off the mattress. His rider's head lolled to the side to look at him. He forced a weak smile.

"Hey bud" he whispered, rubbing his nose "It's ok". Toothless gave him a concerned look and lowered his head to the floor with a depressed sigh. Hiccup sighed also, returning his gaze to the ceiling.

\_What am I going to do?\_ \_Astridâ€¦\_

Click.

Click. Click. CLICK.

"What the-" Hiccup sat up. Immediately his question was answered when Toothless glanced at the window with concern. Hiccup followed his gaze, squinting in the moonlight. He was just in time to see a pebble shoot through the open window, falling onto the floor with a tiny click. He slowly got out of bed and, with his metal leg moaning, shuffled over to the window. If he'd been aiming to get there just in time for a pebble to hit him in the eye, then he timed it perfectly.

"Ouch! What the-? Astrid! What are you doing?"

"I'm writing a song â€" what does it \_look like\_ I'm doing!?" Astrid hissed lowly, to avoid waking up any sleeping villagers "I'm trying to get your attention! Now get down here, or let me in! It's freezing out here!"

"I-" Hiccup swallowed, thinking of Gleb Hofferson "I can't Astrid"

"Why not?" she hissed "Oh forget it! I'll let myself in!"

"No no!" Hiccup groaned. Sorry Gleb, he thought. "I'll come let you in. Just â€" wait a moment!"

Cursing the gods for giving him all the bad luck in Berk, Hiccup snuck downstairs, clunking his metal foot once or twice on the stairs. He'd frozen, for fear of waking up his mother. He didn't want to see her. She'd closed herself into his father's room and hadn't spoken to him since he arrived home depressed and raging. He'd overturned a table on the way to the stairs (which remained that way it seemed) and smashed a plate that had â€" accidentally on purpose â€" been thrown at a wall.

The front door opened with a low creak. Astrid pushed through, shivering and rubbing her arms for warmth. She immediately rushed to the dying fireplace and held her hands out towards it. She smiled at him over her shoulder.

"\_You\_" she grinned "Should be flattered I'm here Hiccup. I will be in a lot of trouble when I go home"

"W-what?" Hiccup stammered nervously "Why?"

"No idea" She shrugged, unconcerned "Da was doing his very best to keep me in the house tonight. Something about being concerned for my wellbeing, afraid I'll get hurt blah blah blah â€" Oh my god, aren't you freezing? It's like an ice cave in here!"

There was a warble and a loud series of clumsy thumps which alerted the two to Toothless' entrance. He wiggled his hind happily at the sight of Astrid and padded loudly over to her. She laughed and scratched his chin. He dropped loudly to the floor, letting her rub his belly. Hiccup shushed the two loudly, running to his father's room and peering in, making sure Valka was asleep. To his surprise â€" she wasn't even there.

\_She must have left. Good.\_

"Hiccup what is with you?" Astrid chuckled, grabbing his shoulders from behind and lightly massaging them, "You're so tense babe. I take it the meeting was Thor-awful"

"Wait" Hiccup spun on the spot, grabbing her frantically by the shoulders and shaking her a little "Why are you here?"

"To see you!" She told him "Seriously! What's the matter?"

"You-" Hiccup stammered, stepping back from her, "You d-don't know? Your dad was going to tell you-"

"Tell me what?" she laughed incredulously, her eyes starting to fill with panic, "Hiccup please " tell me\_"

"Oh this is bad" he dropped to the arm chair in defeat, head in his hands "This is very bad. So bad. God awful bad-"

"HICCUP!" His head shot up to look at her, his eyes pricked with tears "I mean it! Tell me! Now"

"I don't know how to" he whispered, taking her hands "I just don't know how"

Astrid's face softened when she saw tears rolling down his cheeks. He didn't even seem aware of them, which frightened her. Dropping to her knees in front of him, she gave his hands a squeeze.

"Babe" she whispered, "You can tell me anything. You know that"

"How?" he sighed "How can I?"

"Well," she smiled encouragingly, "I always found that speaking helps"

"I'm serious Astrid"

"So am I"

There was a minute of awkward silence. At least Astrid felt it was awkward. However, she felt it was only right to be patient and wait. After a few more moments, Hiccup took her face, and brought her lips to meet his, kissing her softly, slowly. She accepted it, pulling him closer by the shirt. Her fingers suck up into his hair, playing with the braids she's twisted not too long ago. She groaned in passion, reaching her other hand under his shirt and up his back. He shivered and broke away, forehead leaning against hers. His tears had wet her face. She waited.

"I'm getting married" he cried softly, holding her close "To Joan the Fair"

Astrid froze, the information not sinking for a moment. She let him go, frozen to the spot.

"W-what?" she stammered "What did you just say?"

"I'm getting married Astrid" he whispered again, more tears rolling

down his face "The council have made treaty arrangements to merge the two clans in marriage. It- It's marriage or war".

There was silence. Astrid stood up abruptly, walking few paces away from him. Toothless warbled, rushing over to her.

"Go upstairs Toothless" Astrid told him, pointing upstairs "Please" Confused but obliging, he did so. But not without a glance back at the pair before he disappeared out of sight.

Astrid's back was to Hiccup. She held herself, staring at the door, unmoving and silent. Hiccup called her name.

"Astrid"

"When" she whispered. Hiccup blinked.

"When what?-"

"When does it happen?"

Hiccup stood up slowly, watching her like he would watch a feral dragon, unsure of what to expect.

"In a fortnight I'm to sail to Skulldale" he answered quietly, "I'm so sorry Astrid"

Astrid strode over to the door quietly, peering over her shoulder once to whisper "Congratulations" before slipping out the door and closing it with a click behind her.

\_Astrid's right\_ Hiccup thought.\_ It is cold in here.\_

#### 4. Chapter 4

Astrid was not the crying type. Nor was she the type to give up. But that night, standing in the freezing cold outside of Hiccup's house, she did both.

Her shoulders heaved and her throat closed up. Tears streamed down her cheeks, hot and salty on her lips.

Joan the Fair. Rage boiled inside her. If she was so friggin \_fair\_ then why can't she find her own boyfriend!

Astrid grabbed her ax from where she'd left it by the door, and flung it with all her might at the nearest tree. It sunk in with a clunk. Still crying, Astrid stormed over to retrieve it. She pulled, but was unable to release it from the hold it had within the trunk of the tree. She growled, grabbing the handle with both hands and pulled, her sobbing become heavier.

"C'mon you stupid thing" she croaked "Come OUT!" with one last unsuccessful pull, she dropped to her knees and sobbed loudly.

"Astrid?" Astrid silenced, turning to see Valka standing nearby, watching her in horror. Astrid stood up immediately. Glaring at the woman.



"You knew didn't you?" she demanded, pointing a shaking finger "You KNEW and never said a word! Not one word!"

"Astrid, please listen" Valka's accent sounded different. Nasal even. She'd been crying too. Astrid shook her head.

"Why?"

"I'm sorry?" Vallka asked. Astrid blinked, another set of tears falling. "Why is this happening Valka?"

"I don't know, child" she whispered. She approached slowly as the blonde's shoulders shook. She'd pressed her hands to her face, hiding her tears from her. Astrid didn't want her to see her cry.

Valka touched her hair softly. A mother's touch.

"I wish this had not happened" she assured Astrid, "And even more â€" I wish it hadn't been you that was 'urt by all this. Politics are â€" tricky at best"

"But it's not fair" Valka could hardly understand Astrid behind her hands, "He doesn't want this! I don't want this! None of this makes any sense!"

"Astrid" Valka whispered softly "Perhaps you should go home to your Da-"

"No!" Her hands were gone, and Valka looked into the young woman's eyes. They were ablaze with rage and â€" something else. Passion? Love? Who knew. "He knew and didn't tell me! All I knew was that he didn't want me to go out! He kept pushing around the issue of why! Said he'd explain in the morning! At least Hiccup was man enough to tell me!"

"'E probably didn't want to hurt you" Valka suggested, which apparently was the wrong thing to say, for the woman's eyes flashed.

"And what? Hiccup doesn't?" She snapped "Is that what you're saying?"

"No â€" no!" Valka backtracked "That's not at all what-"

"Mum! Get away from her!"

The women turned to see Hiccup storming over to them, a nervous Toothless in tow. He stormed past his mother, pulling Astrid to him and nudging her atop of Toothless. Valka went to touch his shoulder only to be shrugged off with a venomish glare. Valka pulled back, wounded.

"Hiccup-" she begged "please"

"C'mon Astrid" Hiccup ignored her, climbing onto Toothless's saddle in front of Astrid. Valka held out a hand.

"Son-"

"I'm not your son" Hiccup snapped coldly, not looking at her but straight ahead. "Not anymore" With a nudge, Toothless took off, leaving the distressed Valka alone on the ground, watching the couple fly off into the pitch black sky.

"So what do we do?" Hiccup paced back and forth in front of Astrid, who was on the grass, petting Toothless absent-mindedly, "We could refuse?"

The three were sitting on a cliff on the other side of Berk, away from villager ears and away from their parents. Here, Hiccup thought, they could plan their next move.

"Hiccup" Astrid breathed. Hiccup nodded.

"You're right. That probably won't workâ€¦ We could run off? Can't get married if they can't find me"

"Hiccup"

"Or maybe we could elope! Get married now somewhere! Then they \_can't\_ marry me off-"

"Hiccup!" Astrid moaned in defeat, "Just. Stop. Please"

Hiccup looked at her incredulously.

"I can't" he whispered, rushing forward and falling to his knees in front of her. He took her hands in his. Toothless narrowed his eyes in disappointment that the petting stopped. Hiccup looked at Astrid lovingly, a weak smile forced onto his lips "I can't just stop. If stopping means that I need to give \_this\_ â€" what we have here â€" \_up\_, then no! I can't. I â€" I love you Astrid"

Astrid smiled sadly, freeing a hand to touch his cheek.

"I love you too" she whispered, "But what can we do? Like your mum said â€" politics are messy. And war will be imminent. What kind of person would I be to make you choose between me and a peaceful treaty?"

"You'd be the person I want to marry Astrid"

"Oh Hiccup" Astrid shook her head and looked disapproving "We wouldn't even be talking about marriage if this hadn't come up"

"Why?" Hiccup asked "Because we haven't got a marriage agreement written up? So what? It doesn't matter! Astrid, you \_know\_ I only want you!"

"Well apparently it does matter!" Astrid sniffed "Because without it, for all intents and purposes, you're free and available. As am I"

"And what does that mean?" Hiccup demanded. Astrid pushed her hair back from her face, not looking at him.

"It means" she began, her tone emotionless "That my Da will want to work out a marriage agreement with a suitor. I'm of age, Hiccup. If I

can't have you, he'll want to match me up with someone else"

"That won't happen" Hiccup promised, kissing her hand "I won't let it"

"You can't stop it" she snapped, pulling her hand away "Being a chief doesn't take away his right as a father. If I'm of age and have no arrangement in place, he can do what he wants. You cannot stop it from happening"

"What do I do then?" he yelled, standing up and glaring at her "You tell me! What would you have me do?". Astrid stood, glaring back at him. She stood right in front of him, her nose barely an inch from his, and glared into his emerald eyes. Her sapphire eyes flashed with the danger of a true viking warrior.

"You go to Skulldale and marry this whore!" she screamed "And you have tons of little Hiccup babies and live happily friggin after! THAT'S WHAT YOU DO, HICCUP!"

"AND WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO?" He yelled back "WHAT IF I CAN'T FIND A WAY TO MAKE MYSELF DO THAT?"

"TRY!" Adtrid screamed loud enough for her voice to echo. The two glared at each other for a moment, then all of a sudden their lips crashed together.

Toothless looked startled for a moment before realising what was going on. With an uncomfortable look at his rider and his mate, Toothless excused himself to go play in the nearby Dragon Nip.

Hiccup pushed his fingers into Astrid's hair and she clutched at his back, nails digging in to draw him closer. His mouth moved to her neck and she let out a gasp.

"Hi-Hiccup" she groaned "Wait. We can't do this"

"Why not?" he growled, his voice husky with passion as his fingers slipped under her shirt to skim across the skin of her belly "What's to stop us?". She shivered. Of course, they'd been together like this before, usually after an argument or an extremely stressful day. They'd pawed at each other, hands and fingers touching places just nigh of where they really wanted to explore. They'd been waiting for the right time "trying at least" to wait for the moment to be perfect. It seemed now however that it was not meant to be. That it, unless Hiccup threw caution to the wind now. The thought woke Astrid from her daze. She pushed him back a bit.

"Hiccup" she said seriously "What are we doing here?"

"What we both want to do" he said, moving to kiss her again, only to be pushed back by a firm hand on his chest.

"We can't Hiccup" she insisted, panting through bruised lips. "Look, maybe if we were still going to be together like we planned " it wouldn't matter so much. No one else would ever need to know. But now " things have changed Hiccup! We " at least I " need to protect my virtue! Otherwise -"

Hiccup swallowed hard. He understood what she meant.

"Otherwise you're future husband will know" he whispered. Astrid bit her lip and gave a tearful nod.

"I wish it was different" she whispered, cuddling up to him and wrapping her arms around his waist "I wish this day hadn't happened"

"Me too"

"But we need to accept that it \_has \_Hiccup" Astrid held him tighter, "You need to go and do what you need to do. It's what's right"

"It doesn't feel \_right\_" Hiccup scoffed without humour "It feels sick and wrong"

"You're a chief"

"I'm still human" he murmured, kissing her hair "And I still love you"

"I know" Astrid whispered, "I know"

"Sow hat now?" Hiccup asked. He was feeling completely defeated. Astrid clutched at him tightly.

"We go back" was her answer "And we forget that we ever had anything between us"

"Starting from now?" Hiccup let her go. Astrid looked him in the eyes, realising that they'd both been shedding silent tears. Averting her gaze to the ground, she nodded.

"Starting from now"

## 5. Chapter 5

Seven days had passed by, although Astrid felt like it had been at least a lifetime. Hiccup was doing his very best to avoid any contact with her, and she knew it was for the best. But it still felt like a rock in her stomach every time she caught a glimpse of his retreating figure. Hiccup had kept himself busy so far with chiefly duties. Astrid wasn't as fortunate. While she had the Dragon Academy, it wasn't really enough to keep her mind off of her depressing situation. She missed Hiccup more than anyone would understand. Particularly her father.

"I've been in conversation with Mrs. Phlagon" her father had told her this morning over breakfast "Her son wishes to come by this evening to discuss a marriage agreement. He seems a nice boy"

Astrid had not met his gaze, seemingly preoccupied with the porridge in her bowl, of which she had not eaten but had been playing with it until it went clumpy and cold. Gleb went on.

"I've also word from the Youhan Boy. He seems a honest fellow. Good family too. He'd make a good provider"

"Sure Da" Astrid mumbled glumly "Whatever you say"

"Y'know" Gleb pulled her bowl away, earning a frosty glare from his daughter "You could be more involved in this process, Astrid"

"Well apparently I don't have anymore say than the chief" she said coolly "so what's the point"

Gleb's eyes narrowed.

"That's different"

"How?" Astrid demanded, "How is it different? Now that he's forced to marry a stranger, and I can't be with him, suddenly everyone in this Thor-forsaken village is here trying to buy me. Like a sheep, Da! Am I no more than cattle to these people?"

"These people" Gleb insisted sternly "Have your best interests at heart"

"If they had my interests at heart" she challenged "Then they wouldn't be trying to marry Hiccup to a woman he's never met. And I wouldn't be getting married off to the highest bidder"

"Don't exaggerate, Astrid" her father said, shaking his head "I'm hardly going to just let anyone marry you. Do you think that little of me?"

"Well you let the council marry off my fiancÃ©" she snapped, arms crossed as she gave a huff "Why would I think you any better?"

"For starters young lady" Gleb said crossly, pointing his fork at her in emphasis "I didn't let anyone do anything. It was a vote. I tried my best for the boy, but the votes made the decision. Secondly," he reached forward, lifting her chin to look at him. His eyes softened, "I would hope you would never think me the kind of father who doesn't care about who marries his daughter. I do care. I would have gladly let him marry you. But that never happened. We must now take actionâ€¦. I want to make sure you're provided for, Astrid. I- I won't be here forever"

Astrid met his gaze, and saw a flicker of sadness cross over her father's face. Her heart hurt, both for the anger she felt towards him for what he had allowed the council to do, and for the fact that she knew he loved her, and only wanted the best for herâ€¦ which made her feel incredibly guilty. She was damned either way.

"I need some air" She stood up and gave him a polite nod before exiting through the front door. Wordlessly, she climbed onto Stormfly's saddle and took to the sky. Destination: anywhere but here.

Valka hadn't seen much of her son for days. The few times she had seen him, he's made a firm effort to pretend she didn't exist, and was not subtle in doing so. She hurt deep within her very core. 20 years she'd missed her son growing up, and now, here he was. A young man, the whole world at his fingertips, and she'd destroyed any chance she had of being part of it. And she'd successfully been a part of breaking her boy's heart. And Astrid's.

Valka had never wanted this for her son. She would have voted against the decision, alongside Gleb and Gobber. But at the end of the day, she was not an official council member " having been away for so long " and her opinion meant virtually nothing in the grand scheme of things. Not that Hiccup would believe her even if she'd told him this.

Valka herself had been submitted to a marriage arrangement. Stoick and she didn't even meet until a few days before their wedding. But they had been so aligned in spirit, and love took very little time to forge itself between them. Valka was lucky to have found happiness in her marriage to a chief. She wondered if the same would happen to her son.

\_No\_. she decided. \_He'd love only one\_.

Valka resigned herself to the fact that once the marriage vows had been spoken between Joan the Fair and her son, he would never want to speak to her again. And she would not blame him at all.

The next week went by even slower than the last. Before Hiccup knew it, he was on the way to Skulldale to meet his bride to be. It was beginning to really sink in that he was about to meet his future wife. Most men would be thrilled. But Hiccup felt sick.

The ship ride across was long and tiresome. Gobber had agreed to come with Hiccup, as he'd simply refused to have the rest of the council with him, in particular, his mother. No " if he had to do this, then he would do it with Gobber alone.

He'd been advised not to fly, but to leave Toothless in Berk, so not to frighten the other tribe. He'd made the compromise to bring Toothless with, but to sail and keep them both on solid ground for the journey. After all, if he was going to marry this woman, Toothless and she would need to get used to each other. Otherwise, she'd be in for a shock when she returned with him to Berk.

Hiccup wondered how Astrid would feel about Joan returning with him to Berk. During the week, he'd seen man after man waltz himself up to the Hofferson home, offering Thor-knows what to Gleb in exchange for his daughter. Silent rage had burned inside his stomach and chest, so hot that he couldn't eat or drink. He wondered what Astrid thought of all this, but then silently scolded himself. It was none of his business now. She could do as she pleased.

A heavy hand clamped down on his shoulder.

"Well Hiccup" Gobber said glumly "Here we are".

Toothless sniffed the air, his eyes squinting at the unfamiliar smells and sounds. Hiccup touched his head reassuringly, and he nuzzled into his rider's side. The pair looked out at the land before them. Smoke from wood fires hung heavy in the air, and dark clouds seemed to be attracted to the dismal looking village.

The first thing Hiccup noticed when they set foot into Skulldale was that it was as grey and dreary as he'd imagined it to be. The buildings were beige and boring, and the people more so. It was much larger than Berk. In Berk, everyone knew everyone. Here, it seemed, there were many strangers and few friends. Everywhere they went,

however, they were noticed. Mostly due to the big black dragon that strolled along beside them, ears pricked and eyes wide open and wary. There were hushed whispers and stares everywhere. Hiccup heard the occasional whisper of 'dragon rider' or 'son of Stoick'.. it seemed that even in a place like Skulldale, he was well known.

"Excuse me" Gobber said to a middle aged woman, who was carrying a basket of eggs, "May I ask directions to the home of yer chief?"

"Yes you may" she replied nervously. She clutched her basket tight, and her eyes seemed intent on watching the dragon rather than the men before her "If you follow the path up the hill, it will come to a fork in the path. Take the left path. It won' be long until you find 'is home. You cannot miss such a grand ol' house such as tha' â€" I say â€" is tha' - a nightfury?"

Hiccup nodded. The woman's eyes widened.

"What business does he have being in the village?" she hissed lowly "Don' you know it's bad luck to bring a dragon into Skulldale? There's been few a dragon who've landed here and left alive!"

"Well let me assure you" Hiccup replied firmly, his eyes narrowing "My dragon will leave here alive or there will be trouble".

The woman murmured something incoherent and backed away with the nod of her head, her hands quaking. Gobber nudged Hiccup, who was still glaring at the villager.

"C'mon lad" he said "Le's not cause a stir more than we 'ave to".

Apparently the woman's directions had been correct, because within 10 minutes of walking the trio has reached the fork in the path, turned left and were now approaching a grand, if not regal, house. It looked more like a mansion as they approached, not build of wood like most of the other homes in the village but constructed of stone into a two story building with a small balcony high above the doorway. Hiccup paid it little mind, not wanting to really enter the home, until Toothless gave a growl. Hiccup looked at the dragon.

"What's wrong, Bud?" Toothless met his eye and gestured his head upwards at the balcony. There stood a large gentleman, dressed in large bulky furs, standing still and staring at them as they arrived. For a moment, Hiccup swore he sore a slim cloaked figure hiding behind him, but after a quick moment of study he dismissed it as being a figment of his imagination.

The man disappeared inside the home when they reached the door, and suddenly it swung open before them. A little pottery woman looked up at them nervously. Her hair was pepper and salt, pulled back into a loose bun with gentle curls framing her round face. She had a slight stoop and creases in her forehead which suggested years of frowning, or poor eyesight.

"Good evening, sir" she whispered to Gobber, turning her attention to Hiccup and Toothless "Master Haddock?"

"Yes â€"er" Hiccup raised an eyebrow. Master? "That's me" The

woman nodded.

"F-follow me" she stammered. The trio went to follow, then she called quickly over her shoulder "OH! No the dragon must remain outside"

"I think not" Hiccup snapped "Either he comes or we both stay outside"

"Beggin' your pardon, master Haddock" the woman quickly apologized, "It's just the master y'see? 'ell 'ave my head if the dragon sets foot inside the 'ouse-"

"Hiccup" Gobber warned, "We're guests in the man's 'ouse. Madame, I don' suppose ya 'ave a stable or somethin' of the sorts?"

"Oh yes!" she replied "Yes it's directly to the left of the door. I'll fetch the girl to lead 'im 'round"

"No" Hiccup snapped, then upon seeing the woman's startled face, and not wanting to seem totally rude, he softened and offered an apologetic smile "I will take him myself, ma'am"

"Oh, you may address me as Mrs. Stoit, master Hiccup" she stammered "No need ter address me as ma'am"

"Then you can call me Hiccup"

"Oh! I think not!" she insisted "The master-"

"Will be told the same" Hiccup insisted. With a nod to Gobber, he exited with Toothless, leading him around the side of the home. It was further away than he'd thought but eventually he found it and walked Toothless inside.

Toothless stopped at the door and started sniffing the air. Hiccup frowned and turned to look at him.

"Bud?"

"Suddenly, the dragon's eyes widened and his teeth shot out of his gums. Hiccup thought for a moment he was going into attack mode and expected a growl, however the dragon smiled and sat down, his tail wagging and smacking heavily on the ground. He looked over Hiccup's shoulder and licked his lips. Hiccup, in confusion, turned around and gaped.

A young cloaked woman stood before them, holding up a fish, a gasp on her lips.

"Oh my word! He's beautiful!"

## 6. Chapter 6

Toothless pushed past Hiccup excitedly, seating himself in front of the woman, his eyes wide open in pleasure as the girl dropped the fish gently into his mouth. Toothless swallowed it quickly and gave a soft warble. Hiccup frowned nervously, hand on his fire sword in suspicion. The girl didn't even look at him, rubbing Toothless under the chin and simply saying,



"If you pull tha' there sword out, I'll scream and then there'll be hell ta pay"

At her words, Hiccup huffed and removed his hand.

"Who are you?" he asked, confused even more as Toothless flopped heavily onto his back and allowed the girl to rub his belly, his legs flailing about in pleasure. He gave a series of playful grunts.

"You're dragon is amazing" she whispered, not answering his question. Her cloak hood fell back, revealing a head of long, curled red hair and a beautiful face with green eyes. She looked at him and smiled. "He's the last of his kind I hear"

"Yes" Hiccup replied, edging closer "To our knowledge"

"God I hope that's not true" she replied, turning her gaze back to Toothless and grinning. "You are amazing"

"We try not to flatter him" Hiccup laughed, his tension easing "It goes to his head"

"I've not seen a dragon for years" Hiccup smiled at the way she curled her 'r's. It was an unusual accent to him. Pleasant, but unusual.

"Well apparently" Hiccup began "Dragon's don't leave this village alive. Or at least so far they haven't"

"I'll ensure this one does" she replied, meeting his gaze with her deep green eyes, "I promise, Hiccup"

Hiccup started, thrown off balance in surprise.

"You know my name?"

"Of course I do" the woman stood up, ignoring the sound of disdain from Toothless as the ceasing of his petting "I couldn't forget the name of the man I'm supposed to marry" She held out a hand, and Hiccup took it.

"\_Joan the\_ \_Fair\_" she said sarcastically, then laughed and winked "But you can call me Joan. I'm hardly fair."

Astrid was freezing cold as she rushed through the air on Stormfly's back. The air was always colder over the water, but right now that was the last thing on her mind.

She'd stood on the cliff as Toothless, Gobber and Hiccup had set sail for Skulldale, crying silent tears. Her heart was breaking, and she felt powerless to stop it. Her father had told her not to go and see them off, but how could she not? Didn't she owe herself this? To make it final so she could move on with her life? But her plan had not exactly gone the way she had thought it would, because by sneaking out and watching them sail off, she'd had an epiphany.

Hiccup was told not to do a lot of things in his time. For Thor's sake, he'd befriended a dragon when the whole village would have told

him he was crazy. He'd refused to do what \_she said\_ even when she wanted to tell everyone they'd found the dragon's nest! He'd chosen to do what he felt was right over what everyone else told him. He'd refused to stand by and allow Drago to come to them first, and what had happened? He'd reunited his mother and father after 20 years! Hiccup was one of the bravest men she knew. He did what was \_right\_, damn the consequences. She was sure what he was doing now wasn't the right thing. Maybe he thought it was "but hadn't he given this village enough of himself?

She made the split decision to be brave, and do what she thought was right. She mounted Stormfly, and took off after the ship.

Her father was going to \_kill her\_ when he discovered what she was doing.

...

"You're Joan?" Hiccup said incredulously, "You!"

"Well it had to be somebody" she replied lightly "Why not me? Were you expecting someone else?"

"Well, no" he replied "I just wasn't expectingâ€| this"

"Well I wasn't expecting that" she replied with a smirk, hand on her hip and pointing at his metal foot "But you don't hear me complaining". She rested a hand on her stomach and gave a pondering look.

"I'm hungry" she said suddenly, making hiccup laugh in surprise "Are you hungry?"

"Um.. I could eat" he replied. She grinned.

"Let's get out of here" She whispered, grabbing his hand and pulling him to the door.

"Wait! Joan, wait" she cried "I'm â€| I'm supposed to go meet your fatherâ€| I don't think this would be great first impression-"

"Hiccup" Joan turned to him and gave him a suddenly sad smile "Regardless of how or when you meet him, it's going to be painful. He's â€| not a very kind person. I'll spare you and put it off as long as I can. Besides, there's nothing you could do that would make him call off the engagement" she turned away from him, rubbing Toothless' head, who'd wandered over to her "This is kind of his last resort now"

"Last resort?" Hiccup said "Excuse me for saying but â€| I cannot see any reason why you couldn't find a husband on your ownâ€| you seem really nice and.. I mean, if it's okay to sayâ€| You're quite beautiful"

"That's the problem" she mumbled so quietly that Hiccup wasn't even sure if he'd even heard her say it. Suddenly she perked up and grinned at him. She gestured to Toothless' saddle and laughed.

"Shall we?"

...

Joan took Hiccup through the village first, giving him a tour, then they stopped by the local market place. The rode on Toothless the entire time, and were getting stares everywhere they went. Hiccup had his hand pressed on the handle of his fire sword for the first hour of the tour, but after being assured by Joan that no one would harm Toothless, he relaxed and forgot all about it. Toothless seemed quite oblivious to the nervous stares he was getting around the town, and the whispers of the villagers. He was far more interested in the smells of the food. Joan had him stop at a large monument in the middle of the marketplace, and disappeared for a minute or so, returning with a basket of fish, which she then fed him, much to Toothless' delight. A small group of children even wandered up to them to watch. Joan explained that there hadn't been a dragon in the town for over 10 years, and the children would all be very excited to see one this close up. Hiccup grinned.

"Mr?" a small boy tugged at Hiccup's arm "Can I feed a fishy to the dragon?"

'Hiccup handed him one and brought Toothless over. Toothless, seeing the small child holding the fish, held his head out gently, sticking his tongue out for the small child to place the fish onto it, and swallowed it slowly. The children squealed with pleasure. Before long, Toothless was on his back, with 5 or 6 children scratching him head to tow. His tongue hung out of his mouth and his face had a smile of pure pleasure. Joan sighed from where she and Hiccup were sitting in front of the monument, watching then quietly.

"E's truly amazing, Hiccup" she whispered, "You are truly blessed to 'ave such a companion". Hiccup smiled.

"Yes, he really is amazing. He's saved my life countless timesâ€¦ He's my best friendâ€¦" Hiccup's heart suddenly gave a pang as he thought of the beautiful woman back home that he'd been made to give up. He forced a grim smile "wellâ€¦ one of my best friends anyway"

Joan gave him a tender look, and reached over to squeeze his hand. He looked at it as she spoke.

"What's it like" Joan whispered, "You're home I mean". Hiccup went on to tell her all about the dragons, and how villagers and dragons lived together peacefully. He told her about his father â€" and how he found his mother, and about eh dragon academy that had been established.

"It sounds amazin'" Joan gasped in delight "I look forward to seein' it in person"

"It is amazing" Hiccup said quietly "I think you'll really like it" He sighed, wondering how Astrid would feel when he and his future wife returned to Berk. Joan touched his shoulder. He looked at her and she gave him a weak smile.

"You ok?" she asked. He smiled and nodded. \_Pull yourself together\_, He thought to himself.

Joan stood, pulling him up, then put a hand to her mouth, swaying. Hiccup reached to steady her.

"Joan?" he asked. She waved him off with a laugh.

"I'm fine" she said, "I just feel a little ill. It's been such an exciting day â€" I think it has taken it out of me"

"Perhaps I should get you home" she gave him a nod. Hiccup eased her onto Toothless' saddle, much to the dismay of the children, and hopped up in front of her. Her arms wrapped around his waist and he gave the dragon a nudge.

...

Hiccup sat across the table from Gobber, beside Joan, in silence. Joan's father, Chief Flagnoff, stared at him, sizing him up in silence. He'd shed all of his furs, and now sat before them in heavy armour and a leather cape. He gave a heavy sigh and spoke.

"So you are the Haddock boy" he stated "Son of Stoick"

"Tha' he is" Gobber replied sternly.

"You're a lot â€" smaller than I imagined" Flagnoff scoffed humourlessly. Hiccup gritted his teeth and said nothing. "So â€" we should discuss the dowery"

"Hang on" Gobber cut in "In due respect, Chief Flagnoff, Hiccup has arrived only hours ago. Surely he should court the Lovely Joan for a short time â€" before we get into any discussions-"

"You're boy had been courting her all afternoon" Flagnoff's tone sounded unhappy, and Hiccup's hands went into fists. This conversation was turning painful very quickly.

"Ai, be tha' as it may" Gobber nodded, a disapproving look in Hiccup's direction "They are young, and there's still a proper way ter go about arranging a marriage agreement"

"I'm am well aware of the way to arrange an agreement" Flagnoff snapped, his fist hitting the table noisily. Hiccup jumped and Joan reached under the table to touch his wrist. It soothed him, but only a little.

"Then you understand that we expect the arrangement to be performed accordingly" Gobber was firm and unmovable. He would not let Hiccup be taken advantage of, or used to serve this chief's purpose. There was much to be learned, he was sure, of Flagnoff's reasoning behind the marriage before it was finalised. Flagnoff gave a grunt of displeasure.

"What do you propose then?" He asked, waving a hand at Hiccup.

"We propose we a week" Gobber cut in, speaking just as Hiccup opened his mouth "Fer the two to become acquainted. After all, if the young lady is to return to Berk with us, we would like her to be familiar with our customs"

"Is the boy mute?" Flagnoff demanded, staring at Hiccup "Or does he let you do all the talking for him"

"On the contrary sir" Hiccup spoke, clearly and sternly, "I am more than capable of speaking for myself. Gobber, however, is my guardian, appointed by my father"

"Figures given your size" Flagnoff hissed.

"Father!" Joan started. Flagnoff gave her a look and she silenced with a wince. Hiccup leaned forwards, elbows on the table and his voice low.

"If you'd prefer another suitor" Hiccup said coldly "Then we'll be on our way. Please! Let us show ourselves out"

Gobber gave him a puzzled look as he motioned for him to stand up with him, and made like they were about to leave. Flagnoff stood suddenly.

"Wait" he said suddenly. Hiccup turned to see Flagnoff gesture for them to sit again, his face red with badly hidden temper. They did as he gestured, slowly. Hiccup smirked, giving Joan a sideways glance. His bluff had been successful. But instead of feeling proud of himself, he turned his thoughts to Joan.

\_What could be so bad,\_ he thought\_, that her father would be so desperate for her to marry me?\_

Flagnoff leaned forwards, pinching the bridge of his nose. He looked at the pair and sighed in acceptance.

"Fine" he relinquished "One week. Then we will discuss the terms of the marriage". Gobber reached out a hand to Flagnoff, who hesitated for a moment before, reluctantly, shaking it. Gobber smiled.

"Agreed"

## 7. Author's Note

**\*\*Author's note\*\***

\_\*\*Thank you all for the follows and reviews. I'd like to point a few things out while I have the chance, and we're not too far into the story, and I DO plan on it being quite lengthy as there is a lot I want include in it and it all needs to be explained properly to work.\*\*\_

**\*\*Item one.\*\***

\_\*\*This most certainly IS a Hiccstrid story. Believe it or not I have received a LOT of flames (even via messages!). While I appreciate that many people here are die hard fans, even if this story WAS an OCx, I think messaging me with nasty messages goes a liiiittle too far. Please, I love reading constructive criticism, and I love the passion on here from readers, but any nasty messages will be deleted  
\*\*\_\_\_\_

**\*\*Item two.\*\***

**\*\*I understand there are a lot of people wondering about all the different 'inconsistencies' with this story and the tv series and films. That's explained quite simply as I have not seen some of the series due to living in AUSTRALIA and not having reliable internet access to even stream it, so I have to wait until it comes out on DVD to see Defenders (SO NO SPOILERS PLEASE!). But basically, I do apologize for inconsistencies, but this story is going to be written the way I've planned it. If I try to fix all the little bits and pieces I'll never finish the story!\*\***

**\*\*Item three.\*\***

**\*\*This story is going to be changed to a T (possibly even M) rating later on depending on how I end up writing a few chosen chapters later onâ€¦ not extremely important but worth mentioning.\*\***

**\*\*Item four.\*\***

**\*\*I just want to thank everyone for the reviews and kind words of encouragement. It keeps me going \*\***

**\*\*That's all for now. A new, long(ish) chapter coming your way soon!\*\***

**\*\*Sincerely\*\***

**\*\*Singme2sleep\*\***

**\*\*xxoo\*\***

## 8. Chapter 7

Hiccup and Gobber were given accommodation just down the hill from Flagnoff's home, where there was a little inn with a stable for Toothless to reside in (although Hiccup wasn't too impressed when the inn keeper insisted that the 'beast' remain outside at all times). The moment Gobber and Hiccup were alone in the adjoining rooms they'd been given, Gobber knocked Hiccup on the head.

"Ouch!" Hiccup yelled "Why would you \_do\_ that?"

"Tha's for not tellin' me about yer little rendezvous with Joan the Fair" Gobber scoffed "what were a thinkin', Hiccup?"

"It's not a big deal" Hiccup rubbed his head, looking at Gobber in annoyance "It was her idea anyway"

"Tha' doesn't make it any less stupid. Not a good way to impress 'er ol' man"

"It doesn't matter if he's impressed or not" Hiccup snorted, lying down on the bed and heaving a sigh "Like Joan said, he's desperate for me to marry her, whether he likes me or not"

"Tha's another thing" Gobber clunked over to a wooden chair, sitting on it heavily and taking off his peg leg, rubbing the stump of his shin "Why's he so keen ter marry off his daughter so quickly? I

expected all this to take two weeks at least! Yet 'e wants to discuss dowery by the end of t'week?"

"I honestly have no idea" Hiccup groaned tiredly, "She just said that he didn't have many options for marriage for her"

"I wonder what tha's supposed to mean" Gobber pondered for a moment, then shrugged, "I s'poze we'll find out soon enough" He replaced his artificial leg and stood, making for the door joining Hiccup's room to his and hesitated, looking back at Hiccup, who was now staring at the ceiling sadly.

"Hiccup" he spoke quietly and softly "I know this must be 'ard for yer â€" given the circumstances â€" but I just want yer to know tha' â€" I just want you to be happy"

With that, he closed the door behind him, leaving Hiccup alone. Hiccup rolled over onto his side, staring at the wall. He closed his eyes and fell asleep to thoughts of a beautiful blonde viking riding a blue dragon through the clouds.

â€|..

Astrid and Stormfly were both as nervous as one another. Astrid realised that Skulldale didn't have dragons, and news of Stormfly's presence was sure to cause a stir. So when they landed, Astrid was sure to do so in the nearby forest, rather than on the bank. Astrid searched for about an hour before she found a small clearing where the two stopped to rest. Astrid dismounted and removed her axe, and a bow and arrow. Astrid did not know what kind of challenges she would be facing, and decided a long-range weapon would be useful. Stormfly nudge at her rider, touched her beak, and pulled a fish out of her saddlebag. Stormfly gulped it down and clicked in pleasure. Astrid stroked the dragon's head.

"Good girl" Astrid whispered. Stormfly settled herself on the soft grassy floor and laid her head down to rest. Astrid blinked tiredly towards the direction of the village.

"I'm coming Hiccup" she whispered to herself, grabbing a sealed jug of water from her saddle bag and taking a swig "Just as soon as we rest â€" I'll be coming for you".

â€|..

A day had passed and Hiccup had been spending time with Joan around the Village with Toothless. The villager's seemed to be looking at them a lot less now, and were far less wary by his presence. The more time he spent n Joan's presence, the more he began to enjoy her company. She adored his dragon, and she was kind. She reminded him of Astrid in many ways though, like her sense of humour, which made him incredibly love sick.

He'd not confided in Joan about the love he'd left behind, because while he was growing fonder of this red haired maiden, although certainly not in the way everyone probably would have hoped, he knew that she was hiding something. More often than not, this woman was prone to dizzy spells and states of un-wellness. As soon as it came on, though, it passed. Hiccup had made mention of it once or twice, but Joan had shrugged it off, blaming it on her 'getting too excited'

about various things. Hiccup decided to speak to Gobber about it that night.

"So" Hiccup began, as the two were walking along a path on the outskirts of the village, Toothless running along in front of them, chasing birds playfully "Will you miss it?"

"Miss what" Joan asked curiously, linking her arm in his, staring ahead absent-mindedly. Hiccup was beginning to learn that this girl daydreamed a lot, and had a train of thought that was prone to changing quite quickly.

"Skulldale" he laughed in surprise, "Your home. Won't you miss it?"

She gave a shrug and went quiet. Hiccup frowned at her in concern. After a few moments, she perked up with a smile that looked a little forced.

"Not really" she said airily, her tone not really masking her expression "I think Berk sounds great"

"Yes" Hiccup agreed slowly "I mean, it is great. But â€" won't you miss your home? Your friends? Your father?". Joan snorted in a very unladylike manner, making Hiccup's eyebrows shoot up in humour. She gave him a look, as if to say yeah right. He smiled. "Ok, stupid question I suppose"

"I think change will do me good" she said quietly, looking ahead of them again "To get away from everything â€" it will be nice"

Hiccup saw an opportunity and took it in both hands.

"Get away from what exactly?" he asked, trying to sound casual "Is something â€" worrying you?"

"No â€" she replies hesitantly, "Not exactly â€" it's just tha' â€" well-" she stopped walking, and Hiccup did the same, she gently pulled her arm out of their loop and folded them across her chest. She looked at the ground for a long time, before meeting his gaze. Hiccup was startled to see that her eyes were a little glassy and red rimmed, as if she were trying not to cry. Hiccup was startled.

"Hey" he whispered, "I didn't mean to upset you-"

"Can you take me home" Joan suddenly asked, looking at the ground again, before adding quietly "Please. I fear I'm beginnin' ter feel unwell again"

"Of course. Toothless!" Toothless turned and padded over, hearing his name being called. He gave the red head a curious look as she clambered onto his back, ignoring Hiccup's outstretched hand to give her a boost. Hiccup sighed and climbed on in front of her, turning Toothless back towards her home.

â€|..

Astrid slept for Thor-knows how long, but a crack of a trig awoke the blonde viking with a start. She bolted upright and reached for her bow and arrow, turning to her right and extending it in an aim. The



point of the arrow pressed firmly into skin, and her blue eyes met brown.

"I'd drop that knife if I was you" she hissed. The man before her held a knife in his hand, which hung limp beside him. He narrowed his gaze and flicked between her and the dragon. She pressed the arrow firmer against his neck. "I'm not afraid to shoot" she promised. He swallowed hard and dropped the knife. It fell to the forest floor with a thump. "Now, take a few paces back, and hold your hands up" as he obliged, Stormfly awoke and stood, growling behind her rider. The man glanced at the dragon in terror.

"Stormfly" Astrid cooed softly, her eyes never leaving her target "Settle down. It's ok" The man's eyes widened as the dragon laid back down. Her eyes, however, watched the pair intently, ready to disobey her rider's orders if the stranger so much as \_tried \_to harm Astrid.

"It-" the man started in surprise "It listens to you?"

"Funny thing about trust" Astrid replied waspishly "It's earned. And I've earned hers. Now" she lowered the arrows aim to his chest "Tell me, who are you? And why are you here?"

"I could ask you the same" he replied. Astrid mocked letting go of the arrow and he flinched. She smirked. He held up his hands higher in surrender. "Flynnigan" he said "er" Flynn, rather. Flynn Mayes" he replied "I was hunting"

"And what? You just mistook us for couple of deer?" she taunted. He shook his head and then gestured at the dragon.

"I" I've never seen a dragon that tame" he whispered "I" I thought maybe he'd hurt you-"

"She" Astrid corrected, her aim unwavering.

"What?"

"He's a \_she\_|So... You were coming to my aid?"

"Believe it or not" he replied.

"And if I don't?" the man shrugged.

"That's up to you. But it's the truth"

Astrid stared him down for a moment, daring him to give her a reason to shoot. He didn't and he stared straight back. After a minute, she lowered her arrow to her side, and reached down to pet Stormfly on the head. The dragon clicked happily and gave a contented sigh, relaxing. Flynn sighed with relief.

"May I ask who you are?" his voice was curious, and careful at the same time. Astrid thought it wise. He \_should\_ fear her. She meant business.

"Astrid" Astrid replied hesitantly, not entirely sure if she should reveal her identity to a stranger.

"Is there a last name to go with that?" he asked.

"Perhaps. But that's on a need to know basis" She replied with a smirk "And you don't need to know"

## 9. Chapter 8

**\*\*So it would seem that I like writing! Lol I REALLY should be studying for my Vet Nursing cert, but I'm enjoying writing this so much that I just HAVE to chug out these chapters before I lose my muse! So many chapters are already written, but need to be weaved in at the right moment,... It's the filler stuff that takes the longest, so please €" bare with me!\*\***

**\*\*Enjoy!\*\***

**\*\*Singme2sleep\*\***

**\*\*xoxo\*\***

"So how was yer day?" Gobber's smile fell upon seeing Hiccup's glare cast in his direction, and he frowned, sitting up from his lying position on his bed "I take it, it did not go well, then?"

Hiccup clunked over to the chair in the corner of Gobber's room and sat down heavily. He was in a bad mood, for two reasons. The first was that Joan was definitely hiding something from him, which he found incredibly frustrating. The second was that Toothless had seemed agitated to the fullest when he'd had to leave him in the inn stable again. Upon dismounting the grumpy dragon, Toothless had curled up in the hay, covering his face with his tail fins and giving a disgruntled huff. Hiccup had tried to sooth the dragon by offering him a pat on the head, only to be rewarded by a twack across the face by his scaly tail. Hiccup rubbed the small bump that was already beginning to form.

"No" was his sarcastic response to Gobber's question "It did not"

"Wha' happened then, lad?" Gobber perched on the foot of his bed, leaning forward. Hiccup groaned.

"Well I asked her if she'd miss it here when we left for Berk. And apparently I upset her, because next thing I know we're coming back into the village because she wants to go home"

"Tha's no surprise really" was Gobber's reply. Hiccup shot him an unhappy look.

"Thank you" he snapped sarcastically "That's so helpful, truly Gobber! Thanks a lot!"

"All righ', settle down" Gobber soothed, giving his peg leg a tweak, "She's leaving her home, Hiccup. Tha's gotta be hard for anyone to deal with"

"Well that's the thing" Hiccup sat forward, ignoring the soreness of his forehead for a moment as he explained, "When I asked her aout

that, she said she wouldn't really miss it " but that she wanted to \_get away from everything\_ " What could that mean?"

"Why didn't yer ask, ye numpty!" Gobber scoffed. Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"Gosh why didn't that occur to me" another sarcastic remark "I \_did\_! And she got upset, and we came home"

"Well then" Gobber looked up at the ceiling in deep thought and hummed, "Tha' \_is\_ interestin' isn't it?"

"Something's not right here Gobber" Hiccup said, confiding his suspicions "There's something they're not telling us " and I don't like it"

"Me neith'r lad. Me neith'r"

"..

Flynn knew this woman, Astrid, wasn't from around here. The dragon was a dead give away of that. When he'd come across the slumbering beast in the forest, and seen her lying beside it, he'd feared her dead. Luckily for him he'd not slayed the beast in its sleep, or he was sure this woman would have avenged the dragon's death with his life.

Astrid had not confided in him why she was here, where she was from, or even what she planned on doing. And he didn't ask. At least, not straight away. For a long while, she ignored his presence, turning her attention to her dragon, checking it over as it preened itself, occasionally casting a curious glance in his direction, but offering nothing more.

\_This is a beast who is well used to human company\_, Flynn thought as he watched from his sitting position on a fallen tree trunk. The dragon did not seem put off by his presence in the slightest. Although, he added in his thoughts as he cast a look towards Astrid, her companion seemed to be slightly unnerved by him.

"Are you just going to sit there and stare?" she asked eventually, breaking the silence with her annoyed tone "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

"Well, like I said" he replied simply "I was here to hunt. However, I figure the presence of a dragon will somewhat make finding prey a wee bit more difficult than usual, don't you agree? Besides" he gestured to the sky "It's beginning to get too dark to hunt"

She gave a hot huff, and flicked her fringe away from her face, and threw her blonde braid over her shoulder.

"Well" she said "The question is, what am I to do with you now?"

"Excuse me?" He blinked in confusion. She looked at him coolly.

"Well" she began, "I'm here for reasons I don't wish to inform you of, from a place which I don't want you to know about, and I have

things to do which I definitely don't want you witnessing" she put a hand on her hip, and gave him a superior look "So the question is, how do I go about my business now, knowing there's a risk of you running and telling the whole village that I'm here?"

"Why would I do that?" he asked innocently.

"Don't be stupid" she said "It's very unbecoming. I'm riding a \_dragon\_. From what I hear, they aren't exactly common around this place"

His expression darkened and he looked at the ground. Taking a random twig in his hands, he snapped it in half in a sharp jerk of his fingers.

"There's far more interesting things to talk about in town right now" he replied tonelessly "Besides, you're not the only person around here with a dragon. The Chief of Berk is here with his Night Fury. Everyone's too busy raving about that"

"The chief of Berk" he watched as her face filled with a flash of emotion, but as soon as it appeared, it was gone. Replacing it was a look of urgency.

"What is his business here?" Astrid, of course, knew why he was here. However, she was interested in what this stranger knew about the goings on between Hiccup and Joan the Fair.

"He's here to court the Chief's daughter" his face darkened even more "Not that he's anything special mind you. You can put a bean sprout on a dragon but tha' doesn't make him a man"

Anger sparked inside Astrid, and she had to restrain herself before she did something that she might regret.

"Which way is it to the Village?" she demanded. Flynn gave her a questioning look. He pointed to a small, barely noticeable break in the trees, which revealed a foot trodden track. Astrid could barely see it in the dim light of early evening.

"About 15 minutes west" he replied slowly, "Why? Surely you're not planning on bringing that dragon into the village?"

Astrid hadn't even thought that far yet, but she wasn't going to admit it to him. She hadn't quite figured out how she'd get close enough to Hiccup to right the wrongs that had occurred whilst she has Stormfly to worry about. She shrugged.

"I've not really any other options" she replied simply "And besides, didn't you say the villagers had other things to gossip about?"

"Well yeah" he replied, standing up and brushing off his trousers, green from the moss on the tree trunk "But if you walk into town with a dragon in tow, people will \_still notice\_"

"Well" she huffed in irritation, annoyed that she couldn't think of a better plan "What would you suggest then?"

"Well" Flynn started slowly, looking from the dragon, back to Astrid,

"You could always hide herâ€¦ I â€" I have a home right at the edge of the forest, and there's a stable-

"Annd-" Astrid scoffed "You thinking I'm going to just bunny hop behind you all the way to your place? Why should I even trust you?"

Flynn gave her a look, and she silenced. He looked at the knife lying forgotten on the forest floor, back to her. She sighed.

"Fine" crossing her arms, she whistled for her dragon to come closer. Flynn started when she trotted straight up to him and picked him up by the scruff of his shirt, holding him two feet above the ground. He let out a yelp as Astrid clambered onto her back, seating herself on the saddle, "But just because I'm making the decision to trust you, doesn't mean I'm not taking precautions. Now â€" lead the way"

â€¦..

Hiccup was wide awake that night, staring at the ceiling. Gobber's snores could be heard through the paper-thin walls of the inn and it was making for an incredibly long night. Particularly when it was paired with thoughts of Joan's questionable behaviour.

What did she want to get away from here? He thought to himself. Her father seemed extremely uptight, yes, but was that enough of a reason to want to leave? Something just did not add up, and it was going to annoy him until he figured it out.

Hiccup let out a frustrated sigh and sat upright, scratching his head. His fingers snagged on a braid and he let out a yelp of pain. Suddenly, his thoughts turned to Astrid, and he began to feel sad.

He truly missed her. He wondered what she was doing right now. What she still thinking about him? Was she pining? Or worse, was she already over him, and betrothed to another? Someone who'd taken the time to organise an official marriage agreement? He cursed himself for not doing it sooner. The thought hadn't really occurred to him back at Berk. Everyone knew they were together, and naturally, everyone assumed they would be getting married. Even Hiccup. The only thing was â€" he'd skipped the official betrothal part. But Astrid knew that he'd wanted to marry her â€" the bits in between had never mattered â€" to either of them!

"Apparently" he muttered under his breath "They matter a lot"

There was a growl outside that made Hiccup start. He shot out of bed and ran to the open window to see Toothless on the ground below, calling out to him desperately. Hiccup frowned.

"Toothless" he hissed "What-?"

The night fury called again, gesturing his head to the Flagnoff home at the top of the hill. Hiccup followed his gaze. If Toothless was calling out to him at this time of night â€" something was wrong. Very wrong.

"Catch me bud?" he called out to the dragon below. Toothless nodded

and ran over to stand directly below the window. Hiccup clambered outside the window frame to stand on the rooftop. He side stepped to the edge and, holding his breath, jumped, landing on Toothless' back.

"Show me what's wrong Bud" he whispered into the dragon's ear. Toothless growled and charged ahead, full speed, towards Joan's home.

â€|..

"Well," Flynn began testily, gesturing with one hand "Here we are. Home sweet home. Now. Will you kindly \_put me down now!\_"

"Stormfly, drop" Astrid commanded. Flynn landed on his rear with a thud. "Girl girl!" Astrid cooed, patting the dragon's flank affectionately. Stormfly leaned down to sniff Flynn, who was rubbing his aching neck. She clicked in his ear, seeking attention. He shot Astrid a look. She gave a shrug.

"What can I say?" she sighed "Apparently she likes you. Give her a pat on the nose and she'll stop"

"I'd rather not" Flynn eyed the dragon suspiciously. Astrid scoffed.

"Suit yourself" dismounting, she gave the dragon's head a scratch and pulled Flynn to his feet. He muttered a thankyou under his breath and walked forward.

"Here we are" he announced sarcastically "Home sweet home. I suppose"

The large wooden home was situated on the edge of the forest in a clearing. A little way away, Astrid could see the lights of houses through the thick trees under the cover of darkness. She assumed this was the outskirts of the village. The home before her wasn't much to look at, but it was of a good size, and it looked sturdy enough. Flynn pointed to the right, where it looked as if there had been a newer, later addition to the home. There was a flickering light shining through the open window.

"Tha's the stable" he explained, walking over to the back entrance, and heaving it open with a bit of effort. Upon Astrid's questioning look, he shrugged "Rusty hinge. Been meaning to fix it"

"Right" was her reply. She led Stormfly inside. Although Flynn said it was a stable, it looked a lot more like a work shed. There was a pile of firewood to the immediate right of the back door, high enough that it would cause a fair amount of pain if it were to fall onto someone. And to the left there was a work bench, littered with metal tools and bolts. Next to the bench lay a few bales of Hay, and situated in the middle of the room was a fire place. Stormfly pushed past Astrid, and picked up a bale of hay in her beak. With a quick snip, the bale broke free and fell loose onto the floor. Ignoring the scolds from her owner, Stormfly bunched the straw up to make a makeshift nest, and settled herself down. She clicked at the two, proud of her efforts. Astrid tsked.

"Bad girl" she mumbled. The dragon did not seem bothered in the

slightest.

Flynn gave a laugh of amusement.

"No harm done" he said "At least she's comfortable"

"I still don't trust you" Astrid clarified, giving Flynn a wary glance. Her bow may not be re-attached to Stormfly's saddle, but her axe was strapped to her back and within easy reach if she caught scent of a trap. Flynn nodded.

"I understand" was his simple reply "Now â€" did you want to stay in here with your dragon-"

"Stormfly" she corrected "She has a name"

"Of course" Flynn rubbed his neck nervously "Stormfly then. Did you want to stay in here with her? I mean â€" I have a couch â€" but if you'd rather stay in here"

"I would"

"Ok" Flynn turned and sauntered towards the door which Astrid assumed connected this room to the rest of the house "Well â€" I'll fetch you a blanket and a pillow â€" I'll â€" be back in a moment"

"Fine" She watched him flee the room, and turned to her dragon, who was giving her a contented looks from her make-shift nest. Astrid put her fists on her hips and gave her a disapproving look.

"You are too trusting for your own good, you know that?" Stormfly clicked in response, and lowered her head. She closed her eyes and sighed happily. Astrid huffed and looked around. She searched for any sign of weapons, or anything suspicious. She found a toolbox full of small, yet still dangerous, hunting knives and immediately stashed the inside Stormfly's saddlebag. She was taking no chances. She searched the desk for anything that seemed suspicious and was disappointed. Everything seemed normal; Just a bunch of tinkering tools and everyday hammers (which she still hid under a bale of hay for safe measure). It wasn't until she opened a draw under the desk that she found a bunch of letters, tied together with string, that her curiosity was probed. But before she could do anything about it, she heard Flynn's footsteps approaching. She stashed them back where she found them and rushed over to Stormfly's side just in time to see him open the door with an armful of blankets in hand.

"S'all I could find" he apologised immediately, handing them to her "I hope they'll do?"

"They'll do just fine" she replied shortly. Flynn gave her a nod and wandered over to the desk. Astrid watched as he grabbed the handful of letters from the drawer and gave her a pointed look.

"I understand you're suspicions" he said curtly "But I also expect tha' you'll understand tha' I don' like people snooping 'round at my things?"

"What are they?" she asked hotly, not even trying to pretend that she hadn't been snooping. He had either spied on her, or had heard her. She wasn't sure which, but either way, there was no use denying

it.

"Nothin' tha' concerns you" was his reply. He walked to the door and left, calling back behind him "Oh! And you missed the saw hanging up on the wall. Good night"

Astrid, scowling, took the saw down and hid it with the rest.

\_Smart arse\_.

## 10. Chapter 9

It was less than a minute for Toothless to come to a halt in front of Joan's home. Hiccup dismounted immediately and pulled Toothless against the side wall of the building, where they were protected by the shadows. He gave his dragon a questioning look.

"What now?" he whispered. Toothless' eyes were narrowed and his nose flared. His ears twitched, hearing something that was silence to Hiccup's less-than-extraordinary ears, and looked directly upwards with a growl. Hiccup's head snapped up. It seemed that Toothless was looking at the balcony on the second floor of the home. Toothless gave a slightly louder grown, and Hiccup shushed him. He gave Hiccup an annoyed look, and nudged him with his tail.

"Ouch! Why is it always with the tail?" he hissed. Toothless nodded his head towards the balcony, impatience on his face. "I'm going, you impatient reptile" hiccup scowled under his breath. He leant around the corner of the building, looking for anyone who might spot him. After careful inspection, he sidestepped out, but immediately rushed back, hearing a strange noise coming from above. It sounded like a zip, but not quite. Hiccup peered around the corner again, and this time, he understood what the noise was. A long piece of thick rope was dangling down from the balcony, and when he looked up, Hiccup saw a cloaked figure zipping down it. Toothless bared his teeth and narrowed his gaze. Hiccup held up a hand, trying to ease the dragon. The figure landed on the ground with a quiet thump, glanced around hurriedly and dashed off down the hill. Hiccup quickly clambered onto Toothless' back, and gave him a nudge.

"C'mon bud!" he hissed. Toothless didn't wait for him to say it again. He flew high into the air, and Hiccup watched the cloaked figure from above, narrowing his gaze.

"Who are you?" he asked no one in particular "And what are you up to?"

The figure zigzagged a strange path through the village, avoiding all the main paths, and kept his back firmly pressed to the walls of buildings, thoroughly checking around corners before he ran out into any open areas.

After a few more minutes of following, it became clearer to Hiccup that the figure was heading towards the forest at the edge of the village. He instructed Toothless to fly lower, so he could see better; He did as asked. The figure came to a halt at the door of a large wooden shack. Toothless hovered above silently, and Hiccup watched. The figure knocked pulled something from the inside of his cloak, and shoved it under the door, given it a quick rap, and then



darted into the trees. At first, Hiccup thought he was going to run into the forest, but then he realized that the figure was hiding, peering around a tree to see the homeowner open the door, and look outside. His head looked left and right, scanning the area around him, before closing the door. Hiccup gave a confused look as he watched the figure dart back the way he came, scrambling up the hill to the front entrance of the Flagnoff home, and shimmy himself up the rope which he'd but 10 minutes before zipped down. The rope was pulled up the balcony and he disappeared inside. Hiccup gaped.

"Well" he said "That was weird" Toothless warbled in agreement. Hiccup pondered for a moment.

"C'mon Bud" Hiccup whispered in his dragon's ear "Let's go back. I've got a few things to work out" Toothless turned and did as requested. Hiccup pondered the whole way back to the inn. A thought had crossed his mind, but he dismissed it as quickly as it had come up, as it seemed silly even to him.

But he did wonder: could that cloaked person have been Joan?

\_Surely not\_.

As Hiccup flew back to the inn, a pair of green eyes watched from the balcony, concealed behind the window curtain. They watched Hiccup land on the roof of the inn, and clamber through the window of his room, instructing the dragon to return to the stable, which he did (although he did not seem at all pleased about it) and settled down to sleep. A sigh of relief.

\_That was close, that was too close\_. The cloak was removed, revealing longâ€¦ and curlyâ€¦ red hair.

â€¦..

The beams of light from the sunrise woke Astrid, and for a moment she was so confused as to her whereabouts that she bolted upright. As the memories of the day before settled though, she relaxed. Stormfly was sleeping soundly beside her, although she's stolen her rider's pillow, and torn it during the night, to retrieve the filling for her 'nest'. Astrid rolled her eyes, and reminded herself that dragon's will be dragons.

There was noise coming the house, and Astrid rose to her feet. She could smell something, and her stomach gave a grumble. \_Food\_, she thought, against her wishes. Tiptoeing over to the door, she opened it a crack. The hinge squeaked and she flinched, frozen to the spot. A voice called out.

"I know you're there" Flynn called grumpily "Just open the door, for god's sake"

Astrid, irritated already, thrust the door completely open and walked inside. The home was quite clean and well kept, and it was large. Another wood fire was situated in the middle of the home, churning out a great, welcoming warmth. Flynn sat at a table in the kitchen area, looking at her. He was eating porridge from a wooden bowl, and giving her a tired expression.

"Well I didn't kill you" he said testily, glancing at his breakfast and taking another mouthful "Trust me yet?" Astrid walked forward, less wary now.

"Beginning to" she muttered "only half grudgingly" "Thanks I suppose"

"Welcome" he replied through a mouthful of food. Astrid rolled her eyes, then grimaced as her stomach growled again. Flynn pointed to the stove, where there was a large metal pot.

"There's breakfast in the pot" he grunted with another mouthful of porridge "And outside in a bucket there's a fish for your dra- Stormfly was it?" Astrid nodded, and went to fetch herself some breakfast. Stormfly's breakfast could wait, she thought, I'm starving.

She sat at the table and ate in silence. It was awkward, but Astrid was too hungry to care. It was only when she peered up between mouthfuls and noticed Flynn watching her that she stopped and snapped.

"What?" he continued to stare at her for a moment before leaning forward, putting his elbows on the table.

"Why are you here?" he asked. "I wasn't going to ask, but you've perked m'curiosity. So. Why are you here?"

"I'm here," she began slowly "To see a friend"

"And who is this friend?" he probed. Astrid narrowed her gaze, thrusting her spoon at him.

"What business is it of yours?"

"None actually" he replied shortly, leaning back to size her up "But I think given I've shown great hospitality so far, and asked very few questions, that I deserve to know a little information about you"

Astrid stared him down for a long time, debating about whether or not she should give any information at all. Yes, he'd opened up his home for her and Stormfly, but that could very well be a trick. When Astrid confided these thoughts, Flynn rolled his eyes.

"I'm not trying to trap you" he grunted, looking a little hurt "I would just like to know. But fine" He stood up and put his bowl into a sink, taking large paces towards the door. He heaved it open, planning on leaving, but hesitated at the door. He eventually let out a heavy sigh and hung his head.

"Would you" he asked grudgingly "like to see the town?"

"What?" Astrid scoffed, taken aback "With you?"

"Suit yourself then" he muttered.

Astrid stood up immediately and rushed over crying,

"Wait! I'm sorry, that was rude" While Astrid didn't trust him, he

also hadn't given her a reason to doubt his good intentions â€" yet. Besides, she reasoned with herself, a guide might prove helpful. And it'll make me look like less of an outsiderâ€|

"A tour of the town would be great. But â€" Stormfly-"

"She should stay in the stable" he insisted "She's safer there"

Astrid agreed. They quickly took a bucket of fish into her, and she barely gave them a look as they bid goodbye, too invested in swallowing down her breakfast.

## 11. Chapter 10

**\*\*AN: Sorry for the delay. I've been a little unwell and FF did NOT want to let me upload this chapter. But here it is. I made it extra long as a peace offering. Cheers!\*\***

**\*\*Singme2sleep\*\***

Hiccup was late to meet Joan that morning. He'd overslept, exhausted from tossing and turning all night, and arrived slightly disheveled and flustered. He attempted to tidy himself after he rapped on the front door, waiting for Mrs. Stoit to appear and fetch Joan. This had been the norm that last few times he had called for Joan. So when Chief Flagnoff appeared in the doorway, Hiccup jumped.

"Yer late" it was said with a grunt of distaste. Hiccup squared his shoulders and grit his teeth.

"So it would seem" was his cool reply. Flagnoff grunted again. Without removing his gaze from Hiccup he scowled and yelled out Joan's name. Mrs Stoit appeared beside him promptly.

"Master" her voice was meek and barely audible, "Lady Joan is ill today. She's still resting"

"Well wake 'er up then!" Mrs Stoit flinched and, with a curt not, disappeared. Hiccup raised an eyebrow.

"If Lady Joan is unwell," Hiccup offered "I could call upon her later-"

"She'll be down" Flagnoff's tone told Hiccup that there was to be no room for argument. The chiefs, both determined and stubborn, stared one another down for the 5 or so minutes which it took Joan to appear in the doorway, looking pale and all together unwell.

"Good mornin' Hiccup" the words felt forced "shall we take a walk down to the plaza?" She swiftly looped her arm into his, ducking under her father's arm to squeeze through the doorway, and began to drag Hiccup down the hill and away from the home. Hiccup cast a glance over his shoulder, seeing Flagnoff still glaring at the pair for a moment before slamming the front door closed. Hiccup sighed.

"If I'd known you were unwell" Hiccup apologized "I'd have let you rest". Joan snorted. Hiccup's lips tugged in a semi-smile. Her snort

was so unladylike and sarcastic, she could have been imitating Astrid.

"Da wouldn't have allowed it" Joan halted when they reached the bottom of the hill, and leaned wearily into Hiccup's side. He wrapped a steadying arm around her shoulders and squeezed. "Would Toothless be terribly offended if we were to walk today?" Joan asked "I fear I'll be ill if I ride this morn'."

"He'll survive" Joan smiled weakly at this and the pair walked to the inn, arranging for Toothless to be compensated for being left behind with a bucket of fish, and made their way, slowly, towards the village plaza.

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Astrid followed Flynn around the village for hours â€" completely bored. The only bit of excitement, if you could call it that, was when he'd stopped briefly to speak to a middle aged woman, handing her a letter and moving on.

Astrid, reminded of the letters she'd discovered at Flynn's home, asked about this. Flynn did not reply, and after some unsuccessful probing, she gave up. Apart from this little event, nothing worth mentioning occurred. Flynn gave her a guided tour, but Astrid wasn't interested in much of what Flynn was telling her about the town. She was certain a lot of it would have, indeed, been interesting if shed been a visitor or a traveller. However, she was neither of these today, and she didn't have time to feign interest in information of which was not of any use to her. She halted in the middle of the busy street, the villagers behind her having to quickly split up in order to dart around the sudden obstacle in front of them. They shot her dirty glares as they hurried off. Flynn turned and grabbed her wrist.

"What are ye' doing?" He sounded irritated as he pulled her aside onto the greenery that skirted along the edges of the paved street "Ye can't just be stopping in the middle of the street" Astrid pulled her wrist away roughly and folded her arms over her chest in impatience.

"As nice as all this is" her tone was a little sarcastic, which irritated Flynn even more "I don't find any of this interesting, or useful!"

"What did you expect?" Flynn mirrored her by folding his arms also "what exactly should I be doing? It's hard to help you when I've no idea what you need to know". Astrid sighed and thought about this. It was true, it was hard to find ways of gaining information if her guide didn't know what information she was looking for.

"Fine then" Astrid conceded with a sigh, "I'm â€" I'm looking for Joan the fair"

Flynn's eyes widened momentarily, then relaxed. It did not, however, go unnoticed by Astrid, who was all of a sudden very suspicious.

"That" Flynn arched an eyebrow "Is most definitely unexpected" Flynn turned, squinting up the hill a few hundred paces or so away from

them and pointed, "She and her Da live in the manor up the hill and to the left"

Astrid followed his gaze, momentarily forgetting her suspicion and started forward. To her annoyance, Flynn grabbed her wrist again. She promptly wrenched it away again.

"Ye can't jus' go waltzing up to the Chief's house unexpected" Flynn scoffed, wide eyed, "May I ask why you've an urgent need to find Joan the Fair?"

Astrid gave him a look, which Flynn struggled to comprehend or translate. A great gust of wind blew through, blowing hard past Astrid's face. She breathed out slowly, then, looking up the hill with a distant look in her eyes, she spoke.

"Joan the Fair â€" she has something that belongs to me" Her blue eyes flashed to Flynn's, fierce and strong "And I want it back"

There was a great roar, and suddenly, Astrid was knocked off her feet, flat onto her back with a pair of enormous green eyes staring into hers, and in an instant her entire face was covered in dragon slobber.

â€|..

Toothless wasn't happy about being left behind. Even a bucket of fish, which he'd quickly demolished, couldn't soften the hurt. He didn't understand why he had to stay behind. He wanted to be with his rider. He wanted to fly. They'd barely flown the last few days. Toothless needed to stretch his wings. And he'd smelled something all day that made him want to fly even more.

He smelt another dragon.

It had been a few days since he'd smelled another dragon â€" so when he got his first whiff of it, he knew immediately that there was another somewhere close by. With no fish here to be eaten, and no Hiccup to take him flying, Toothless made the decision to venture outside and follow this smell. If Hiccup wouldn't take him along, then he'd find something else to do.

People cast him worried glances as he sniffed the air. He took no notice. They smelled like people. The only people he would be interested in were the ones who smelled like dragons.

He padded along, his nostrils flaring with effort. The smell seemed to be moving about. It wouldn't stay put. It made it harder to find. Toothless weaved through people everywhere. They darted out of the way. He paid them no mind. He was busy smelling things.

A gust of wind blew through and the smell of dragon hit Toothless' nostrils strong and fresh. His eyes narrowed and he glanced around, looking for any sign of scales, tails or wings. But what he saw made him even happier than any of these. A streak of blonde air and the smell of dragon meant one thing to him, and it was a very welcome sight.

Toothless galloped enthusiastically towards Astrid, letting out a

loud, excited warble and knocked her to the ground, looming over her and showering her with affectionate licks to the face. She smelt like dragon. She smelt like home. Toothless liked home. Toothless liked dragons, therefore, he liked Astrid. Astrid usually smelt like his rider, but she didn't this time. He didn't think about this too much. Right now, all he cared about was having a familiar face. His rider's mate would always be his second favorite sight in the whole world.

Or fish. Toothless loved fish.

â€¦

Joan and Hiccup were strolling around the cabbage fields when a group of passing villagers informed them that his dragon had 'attacked' a woman in town. Hiccup had insisted that this was impossible, but rushed to the plaza regardless, Joan in tow. People were whispering and gossiping as the pair passed. A lot of it was heard in snippets such as 'his beast is a menace' and 'shouldn't be allowed to bring dragon's into the village!'. Hiccup ignored all of it. It wasn't important. He was used to people saying such things by now.

On the way, Hiccup ducked his head into the stable at the inn. It was empty. Hiccup scowled. So Toothless had definitely wandered off after all. Joan took his hand and pulled him towards the plaza. Hiccup's heart thumped with anxiety when the pair arrived to an empty plaza.

"Where is he then?" he gasped. Joan touched his arm.

"Perhaps they were mistaken?" was her suggestion. Hiccup shook his head. Toothless wouldn't have attacked anyone, but he was definitely not at the inn. He must have been here at some stage. She glanced around and spotted a nearby farmer pushing a wheelbarrow of potatoes.

"Sir" she hurried over to him, "'Ave you seen a dragon around the plaza today?"

"Sure as anythin'" was the farmer's reply. He set the wheelbarrow down and scratched his head, "E' was 'ere less than an hour ago"

"Where did he go?" Hiccup asked. The man shrugged.

"Beats me. None of me business. Now, if you will excuse me" with a grunt of effort, he picked up the wheelbarrow handles and trudged away. Hiccup growled in frustration. Joan sighed.

"He may 'ave gone back to the inn"

"I don't think so" Hiccup spun around wildly, desperately searching for a sign of his dragon, "Where \_are\_ you, Bud?"

Joan gave a grim smile. Hiccup seemed incredible distressed, and she was beginning to feel guilty. After all, it was only because of her request that they left Toothless behind. She opened her mouth to comfort Hiccup, however a shout cut her off abruptly.

"Joan!"

Hiccup and Joan spun towards the voice. A young man was jogging in their direction, seemingly running out of energy as he got closer. Hiccup turned to Joan, who had turned white as a ghost.

She shook her head, speechless. Hiccup frowned.

"Joan" panted the tall young man as he slouched over, resting his hands on his knees and gasping for air between words, "I - know - where - where the dragon is" Hiccup's eyes widened.

"But how-?" Joan whispered. Hiccup ignored her.

"Where is he?" he begged "I need to find him"

"Come with me" the man insisted, ignoring Hiccup and speaking only to Joan. He was holding out a hand to her. She shrunk back. He looked hurt for a moment, and then the expression was replaced with indifference. Hiccup shook his head in frustration.

"Joan" he hissed "We need to go find Toothless! What's the matter?" he glanced suddenly at the man, then back to Joan. The feeling the tension was welling up between the three, "What don't I know?"

Joan looked at him with wide, innocent eyes. She blinked and gave a smile, which Hiccup now recognized to be forced.

"Nothin'" she replied. She gestured a hand to the man, and introduced the two.

"Hiccup, this is Flynnigan. Flynnigan, This is Hiccup" she stared the young man down and added finally "He's chief of Berk and my betrothed"

â€¦..

A crowd of villagers had gathered, a mix of shrieks and gasps filling the air. Flynn watched Astrid struggle to push the enormous Night Fury off of her, scowling something about never being able to get rid of the smell of dragon spit. Flynn felt the crowd getting nervous. Dragon's weren't normal here, and they certainly didn't interact with people. At least, not unless they were about to devour one. At the first sign of a pitchfork, he decided to step in.

"Now, now, dragon" he began, sounding braver than he felt as he approached the beast, "Ease up. That's a boy-" He reached out a hand to touch the beast.

Large green eyes turned to glare into his, and his hand froze. The dragon bared his teeth and gave a tiny growl, which was interrupted by a soft hand on his flank. Astrid murmured something and the Night Fury calmed, stepping back to allow Astrid to stand up. She brushed herself off and gave the dragon an affectionate scratch under the chin. He seemed to enjoy it, but his eyes never left Flynn's.

"Are you alright?" a villager called out, but not seeming game to rush over to assess Astrid for wounds. Another villager called out.

"That beast just attacked you!"

Astrid turned and scowled at the group, rolling her eyes.

"If by attacked you mean 'slobbered me to death' then yes, he did" she smiled at the dragon, giving him a pat on the nose, "He's a friend. He just gets excited"

The villagers seemed to linger, and Flynn worried for a moment that they were pondering whether or not they should be taking action towards the dragon. He swallowed and forced a nonchalant look on his face.

"You heard the lady" he laughed in a light manner "Nothin' ter see here. Move along now!"

One by one, the villagers dispersed, leaving Flynn, Astrid and the dragon alone with a bunch of questions lingering in the air. Flynn was going to ask, but Astrid shot him a look that inferred the word later. He shrugged and watched the dragon and Astrid interact as if they were old childhood friends who had not seen one another for years.

Flynn chuckled to himself and looked findly as the excited dragon, who was currently having his belly rubbed by Astrid, who was cooing 'who's good boy?'.

Flynn's life was certainly getting more interesting by the hour.

"We really should move" Astrid said suddenly "I don't like the way those people were looking at Toothless"

Toothless, Flynn thought, I'll 'ave to remember that.

"Of course" he nodded in agreement "Shall we go back to check on Stormfly?"

"Yes" Astrid cast a wanting look up the hill, and gave a regretful sigh "I think that would be best. Toothless" she was now addressing the dragon "I don't know where your rider is but I have a feeling you're not supposed to be wandering around on your own". The dragon gave her a sarcastic look and huffed. She shook her head and chuckled despite herself. Astrid was careful not to mention Hiccup's name, or to explain in words as such that she was here to find him, although she was certain that Flynn would figure this out for himself.

She wasn't going to be the one to confirm that theory.

The pair began the slow walk back to Flynn's home. A few minutes in, Flynn noticed that the Night Fury was in tow, frolicking around the long grass beside he path as they walked. He called to Astrid over his shoulder, as she was lingering behind.

"So is the dragon coming with us then?" Astrid responded with a shrug.

"I guess. I don't know where he's been staying, so I suppose, yes. He will be coming with us"

"Surely" Flynn insisted "Someone should inform his rider"



Astrid's heart gave a little flutter at the prospect of seeing Hiccup. She was about to offer when Flynn beat her to it.

"You go on ahead" he ordered "I'll go fetch his rider"

"B-but-" Astrid began, but was ultimately cut off when Flynn darted past her, back in the direction of the town.

"I'll be back soon" he called. Astrid watched him go, feeling irritated with herself that he had let him order her about like that. But then again, he would probably know where to look for Hiccup. And she didn't want to give the game away completely by seeming too eager to go find the dragon's rider.

Toothless warbled softly and Astrid looked over to him just in time to see the dragon rolling around in the grass. She rolled her eyes.

"Oh Toothless" she sighed, feeling half-content for the first time since she arrived "how I've missed you"

â€|.

Hiccup was annoyed, and he wasn't going to hide that fact. But was annoyed him even more was the fact that Flynn ignored that he was annoyed, and Joan merely cast a tense glance between the two, saying nothing.

Hiccup, upon being introduced, had held out a hand to Flynn. Flynn had promptly scoffed and ignored it, talking only to Joan.

"Are you coming or not?" He'd demanded. Joan had conceded, only because the dragon was Hiccup's, and agreed to follow him, but had not bothered to explain to Hiccup how she knew this man or why he was refusing to talk to Hiccup.

Hiccup stormed behind Joan and Flynn, silently fuming. He'd attempted to ask Joan who this man was, but each time she'd merely shaken her head and trudged onward at a quicker pace, leaving a scowling Hiccup in her wake. After a few times he'd given up and taken up silently cursing.

"So why did you take my dragon" Hiccup suddenly demanded of Flynn, his tone abrupt. Flynn scoffed.

"I didn't take your dragon" was Flynn's waspish reply, "He followed us"

"Who's us?" Joan asked suddenly. Flynn shot her a look that lasted long enough for Hiccup to become suspicious. Flynn turned away with a shrug.

"Just a friend" Hiccup gritted his teeth as they neared a wooden shack near the beginning of a thick wooded area.

"Toothless had better be alright" he threatened "Or I'll-"

"Would you relax" hissed Flynn, coming to a halt and turning to face Hiccup. He stood up straight, towering a head above Hiccup "I've done

nothing to your beast, alright \_Dragon boy\_?"

"Flynn" warned Joan. Flynn looked at her, then huffed and backed away.

"Fine". Hiccup's teeth were clenched. Who the hell was this guy? And what was he to Joan anyway? Flynn gestured to the stable beside the home.

"He's in there" Flynn crossed his arms over his chest and smirked "Maybe you should be more careful where you leave your pet next time"

"Maybe you should mind your own business" Hiccup snapped, "Toothless! Come here bud!"

There was a sound of excited scuffling before the dragon suddenly clambered out of an open window and bounced over to his rider, nuzzling him everywhere. Hiccup was annoyed that he'd wandered off, but didn't want to hold it against him. He was just glad he was safe. He patted his dragon head and muttered a begrudged "Thankyou" to Flynn, who huffed.

"I suppose I can't take all the credit" he admitted looking at Joan. She frowned at him.

"What do you mean-?" a woman's voice cut her off.

"Hiccup"

All eyes were on Astrid, who had appeared at the stable door. Hiccup's hand fell from Toothless' head and he stared. Whatever she'd been expecting from him â€" she didn't get it. Hiccup shook his head.

"Astrid - Why are you here\_?"\_

## 12. Chapter 11

Astrid wasn't given a chance to give Hiccup an answer, for he'd stormed over to her, pulling her inside by the wrist and slamming the door behind them, leaving a surprised looking Joan and Flynn to wait outside with Toothless.

Stormfly's head popped up, hearing the loud bang of the door and cocked her head in worry at the pair. Astrid, wanting to be alone with Hiccup, pointed out the window and the dragon squeezed herself through it, joining the three outside.

Hiccup let go of Astrid's wrist and turned to face her. He folded his arms over his chest.

"Why are you here?" He asked again. Astrid's stomach dropped painfully. She swallowed down the sensation of dread as best she could.

"Why do you think I'm here? I came her for you" she replied.

Hiccup did not look pleased. On the contrary, he seemed to age 20

years in the space of a few seconds. He looked away, pinching the bridge of his nose, the feelings of stress rising.

"Astrid" he groaned wearily, "You can't be here"

"It's not right, Hiccup! It's not what you want"

"Well apparently that doesn't matter, does it?" Hiccup snapped, "This is what I have to do Astrid!"

"But you don't have to do anything!" Astrid grabbed his hand "You can stop this Hiccup! Just come home with me. Say no"

"I can't Astrid" Hiccup's voice rose over her pleading "This is what it means to be a chief"

"Chief?" Astrid snarled suddenly, thrusting his hand away. For the first time, she was starting to feel like she'd made a bad decision coming here "Giving into blackmail and breaking promises? Yes, that's chief material right there".

Hiccup flinched, hurt. Maybe that had been her intention. She wasn't even sure at this point. He didn't know what to say. He stammered.

"I- I didn't promise anything, Astrid" his voice was quiet, and his eyes met hers, begging her to understand, She shook her head and gave a disbelieving laugh.

"So what? Everything we had - It's all worth nothing?"

"That's not what I'm saying, Astrid" He reached for her. She flinched, stepping back and rubbing her arms.

"That's exactly what you're saying" she whispered.

She looked at the ground, tears well and truly threatening to fall now.

"You know what? We didn't have a marriage contract, so technically you didn't promise me anything... I guess I just assumed after all this time that we didn't need a marriage contract.. clearly that was my mistake"

"Astrid-"

"You're right Hiccup" Astrid cut him off suddenly "I shouldn't be here" She didn't want him to see her cry especially now, she turned to the door, wrenching it open. Hiccup grabbed her wrist.

"Where are you going?" he demanded desperately. He hated fighting with Astrid at the best of times but this this was just awful. They'd never fought like this. Astrid wrenched away violently, taking him aback. She clutched her wrist with a look of disgust and he felt horrible. That look she'd never look at him like that before

"I'm going home" Astrid looked him directly in the eyes, praying to Thor that her tears would not fall just yet "I have a marriage

contract to sign"

"What?" Hiccup cried out, his eyes bulging "What marriage contract?"

"It no concern of yours" Astrid hissed. She shook her head in disgust and turned away "Have a nice life"

Staring at her in shock, Hiccup watched Astrid storm past Joan and Flynn and even Toothless and mount Stormfly.

Giving Stormfly a nudge, the dragon took off, and Astrid flew into the distance, without so much as a glance back. In the safety of the distance, where Hiccup could no longer even see them, Astrid threw herself against Stormfly's neck, for the one thing she thought would be hers forever had been lost.

..

"Well" Flynn broke the silence "That was awkward"

"Flynn" Joan snapped. Flynn ignored her, smirking at Hiccup.

"Wha's the matter dragon boy? Did the wee woman beat yer up?"

"Flynn, shut up" Joan elbowed him roughly in the guts, making him gasp. She rushed to Hiccup's side, touching his arm.

"Is everything is everythin' ok?" Joan already knew the answer when she looked into his eyes and saw the red rims of unshed tears. She'd not heard the conversation from outside, but she knew that it was not a quarrel between friends. The puzzle pieces put together, she asked the question "Was that your girlfriend?"

Hiccup rubbed his chin, looking away from her and blinking furiously. He shook his head; unable to answer for fear he'd start sobbing. Joan suddenly felt incredibly guilty. She touched his hand, which he wrenched away.

"I need to go back to the inn" he whispered "Toothless needs to be fed". Toothless wasn't paying the slightest bit of attention. He was staring, still, after Stormfly and Astrid. He seemed incredibly distressed and confused. This made Hiccup feel even worse.

Joan nodded. He helped her onto Toothless' back. Hiccup completely ignored Flynn, and was so deep in thought that he didn't notice the look that passes between him and Joan. Flynn opened his mouth to say something but was silenced with a shake of Joan's head.

"C'mon Bud" Hiccup whispered "Let's let's go back" Toothless warbled in protest, looking again to the sky. Hiccup nudged him, receiving another noise of protest. "Toothless! Go!" the dragon flinched at the harsh tone, as did Joan but she didn't comment. Toothless heaved a great sign, obeying his rider and taking off into the air, leaving Flynn alone to watch them disappear into the sky.

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**\*\*I know it's short, but I had a bit of writers block at the end! I know what is going to happen but ill health is distracting me. I'm sorry if it feels rushed or isn't written as well as usual. I'll make up for it next time. Promise.\*\***

**\*\*Singme2sleep\*\***

### 13. Chapter 12

Joan curled up on her bed, holding her pillow tight for fear she might cry. Mrs. Stoit sat behind her, stroking her red hair soothingly. Joan sighed.

"It was my fault"

"It wasn't yer fault" Mrs Stoit sighed "You're far too 'ard on yourself"

"But it is my fault" Joan argued fiercely "If it weren't for me, none of this would 'ave happen'd!"

"Aye" Mrs. Stoit agreed "But you didn't force anyone's hand"

"I'll bet father did" Joan grunted miserably "I bet he gave him no option"

"E's just lookin' out fer ya"

"E's lookin' out for himself!" Joan sat up abruptly, hair flying wildly "'E doesn't care about me! All he cares about it what the village thinks of him!"

"I'm sure tha' isn't true" Joan didn't find Mrs. Stoit's attempt at loyalty convincing. She knew as well as Joan what her father was like. Joan turned to the older woman, teary eyes and distressed.

"Wha' should I do, Mrs. Stoit?" she begged "How do I make it right?"

Mrs Stoit opened her mouth to speak, but then, thinking better of it, went silent. She considered for a moment before answering with deliberate caution.

"I think you should marry the young lad like yer father planned. It's best for you, M'lady"

"But wha' about them?" she demanded "Wha' about what's best for them?"

Mrs Stoit reached out and tucked a strand of unruly, curly red hair behind her ear. She kissed her on the forehead, giving her shoulder an affectionate squeeze.

"Excuse me for sayin', M'lady, but I'm more concerned about wha's best fer you" She stood up and strode over to the door, carrying the candle which illuminated the bedroom with her. She glanced at Joan over her shoulder, a weak smile on her lips. "Now rest, miss. You had a lot of excitement today.. too much isn't good for-"

"I know" Joan rolled her eyes, pulling her fur blanket over her legs and lying down in bed. "Goodnight Mrs. Stoit"

"Joan"

"Yes?"

"I've another letter from you. I put it beside your bed butâ€¦ I'm concerned tha-

"It's nothing. That'll be all Mrs Stoit"

"But Miss-" Joan sat straight up, determination clear in her fiery green gaze.

"\_That'll be all\_, Mrs Stoit"

"Right" Mrs Stoit sighed and turned away "As you wish. G'night M'lady"

"Goodnight"

Joan closed her eyes as the door clicked shut. She listened for the sounds of retreating footsteps until she could no longer hear anything but the ring of silence. Certain of being alone, Joan lit her bedside candle and reached for the letter. It was smudged with greasy fingerprints and small traces of dirt. Joan grimaced and opened it.

\_I want to see you.\_

\_Both of you.\_

\_You know where.\_

Quietly, Joan slipped out from under the blanket, pulling on her boots and putting on her dark green cloak, tucking her hair under its hood. From under her bed she retrieved a long coil of rope.

She secured it to the foot of her bed, giving it a tug for good measure, and stretched it out onto the balcony, lowering it over the edge. She glanced behind her, her heart beating hard, as it always did when she was doing something she knew would land her in big trouble if caught. But she needed to go. She had to see him. Tonight.

After putting on a pair of gloves, she carefully climbed over the edge of the balcony, lowering her body until she was dangling, only held up by gripping the edge. She grabbed the rope in one gloved hand, ensuring she had a firm enough grip before doing the same with her other hand. She froze and looked below, searching for anyone who might bare witness to what she was about to do.

Seeing nobody, she sighed and began the painfully slow slide down the rope. Her boots hit the ground and she took off running.

â€¦..

Astrid circled the island numerous times with Stormfly, unable to truly leave.

Her heart ached and her eyes hurt from crying into Stormfly's flank for so long. Flying high above the clouds for hours though, had given her time to think.

Leaving now would seal her fate, and Hiccup's. Leaving now means coming here would have all been for nothing. Regardless of how awful their conversation had gone, Astrid couldn't help but feel that leaving Skulldale would be to abandon Hiccup when he needed her mostâ€¦ even if he didn't agree.

She directed Stormfly to land in the wood, where they had landed initially when they arrived. She needed to think. She needed to find a solution.

There had to be one, there just had to be.

Night had fallen over the town now, and the only light Astrid could see came from the faint glow of houses, barely visible through the thick forest trees, and the light cast by the moon above them.

Stormfly nestled herself down on the soft forest floor, allowing her rider to lean against her side while she pondered. Occasionally, the dragon gave a concerned click, unused to such a long period of silence, but was reassured each time when Astrid would scratch under her chin.

The dragon was just beginning to doze when a twig snapping in the forest put her on edge. Her head spun around, looking for the source of the noise.

"It's ok girl" Astrid stood slowly, touching her dragon's head to calm her "I heard it tooâ€¦" another crack, further away this time. Astrid squinted and swore she saw a figure hurrying into the woods. A familiar figure. Flynn even.

She looked at Stormfly, standing up to follow "Stay here girlâ€¦ he'll hear you if you move"

Grudgingly, the deadly nadder did as she was told, watching her rider sneak further into the forest with apprehension.

So preoccupied was she with her rider's retreating figure, that she failed to notice a second cloaked figure hurry off in the same direction, moving as silent as the night.

â€¦..

Joan moved silently through the forest. She was careful to avoid any twigs which looked at risk of snapping under the weight of her foot. It felt further away than she'd remembered it to be â€" perhaps her anxiety of getting caught was the cause of this â€" but eventually she arrived at the clearing.

He'd asked her to meet him here. All the other times, she'd refusedâ€¦ afraid of getting caughtâ€¦ He'd taken no notice of her letters, begging him to leave her be. Well now she was here, at their

spot, waiting for him.

The ground was soft and mossy. Many a summer they'd spent lazing here, late afternoons passed by looking at the clouds above. They'd been children then. Barely 16 years old.

They'd had their first kiss here. And they made love here. Joan was pushing the thought from her mind as a familiar voice called her name.

"Joan"

"Flynn"

".."

Astrid followed Flynn as fast as she could, but her attempts to remain quiet meant that eventually, he was so far ahead that she lost sight of him.

Scolding herself, Astrid looked around helplessly, looking for a trail of some sort, or a way of finding him.

".."

She turned to him. He watched her closely, as if he were afraid that any sudden moves would startle her. "Well I'm here Flynn" "Like you asked"

"I can see that" he replied quietly, moving towards her.

"You know this is a big risk for me" she explained, "If I'm caught here with you-"

"I don't give a damn" Flynn reached for her and pulled her close, pressing his mouth to hers passionately. For a moment, Joan relished in the familiarity of her ex-lover, but, coming to her senses, she pushed him back.

"Why did you ask to see me?" she whispered "Particularly after this afternoon"

"I gave the woman the letter before I saw you" he explained, touching her hair, as if fearing she'd disappear "Regardless, I 'ad to see yer"

"Why?"

"I miss yer" he smiled sadly at her, pulling her close as she'd allow "I think of you all the time"

"I miss you too" she replied quietly.

"And - I know you still love me" he whispered, holding her face, "but I know that - we can't escape the fact that I'm just not enough for you"

The hurt in his voice stirred feelings that Joan had been ignoring for months.



"Don' say tha'" Joan whispered back, touching her beloved's face "You know that's not wha' I think".

Flynn rested his forehead against hers, then, gently, he moved one hand away from her face and downwards to press it flat against her belly. Joan laid her hand over it. She smiled sadly, eyes closed.

"It's but a wee bump" she whispered "but it's yours all the same"

Flynn sniffed, kissing Joan's nose tenderly, his eyes closed. He relished every moment he spent with this beautiful woman... and the babe she carried.

Especially now that those days were numbered.

â€|..

Astrid gasped silently, pressing her hand over her mouth to stifle any noise. Oh my Thor, she thought, Joan is with child! And it's Flynn's!

I have to tell Hiccup, she thought, this changes everything!

"We could run away Joan" Astrid attention was brought back by Flynn's hushed whispers "all three of us! Damn the consequences!"

"Flynnigan" Joan kissed his mouth gently, tenderly "if only it were that easy. But it's not"

"Postpone the weddin'!" Flynn insisted, "Give them any excuse! It'll buy us time to figure out a plan"

"If I postpone it any long'r" Joan cried "Everyone will know! They'll figure it out, Flynn! I'm already pushin' for time! I need to do this â€" and soon! We can pass it off as an early babe-"

"And 'ave him raise \_my\_ babe?" Flynn hissed, holding her tighter "It's not right, Joan"

"It's my duty-"

"Why?" He demanded "because your a chiefs daughter? I love you Joan! You're carrying my babe! Tha' has to count for something!"

"Please don't make this harder than it already is" Joan eased, tears beginning to fall.

Astrid frownedâ€|. So, Joan didn't want this marriage to happen either? She was as much a victim of politics as Hiccup! If she didn't marry, and \_soon\_â€| everyone would knowâ€| she was carrying a babe â€" and she was going to pass it off as Hiccup'sâ€|.. this explained the rush for the wedding â€" and why her father was so insistantâ€| if anyone found outâ€| he'd be a laughing stockâ€|

"You need to go" Joan weakly tried to push Flynn away, but he wouldn't budge.

"Joan" Flynn whispered, before pulling her close as he kissed her mouth. She struggled for a moment, but relented when he tilted his mouth against hers. Her hands were in his hair, and the pair was groaning with passion. Astrid had seen enough. She turned to leave, the cogs in her head turning at full capacity.

SNAP!

She looked down at her feet. Without meaning to she'd stepped on a fallen branch, snapping it into two. She froze. The sounds of the couple had ceased. Panic stricken, she turned to run, but found herself colliding with the red haired Joan, who, taking Astrid by surprise, spun her and instantaneously had her in an arm lock of which Astrid could not escape. A knife pressed to her throat.

"Make a move and I'll end yer" she hissed in her ear. Astrid froze, hardly daring to breathe.

"Joan stop!" Flynn cried, hurrying into Astrid's line of vision. The two women looked at him, Astrid with relief, and Joan as if she though he'd gone mad.

"She heard ev'rythin' Flynn!" She cried desperately, "she'll tell the 'ole village!"

"No she won't" Flynn said. He met astride gaze. She nodded and he looked to Joan. "She won't, Joan"

"How could you possibly know tha?" She demanded, tearful and frightened.

Astrid took advantage of Joan's fear, which had loosened her grip on her, and broke away. Joan made to grab her again, only to be restrained by Flynn.

"Wait!" Astrid turned to face the pair. Joan was fighting against Flynn to no avail. Her eyes sparked with desperation. Astrid held up her hands in surrender "Wait, Joan! I â€" I'm not going to tell everyone! I promise!"

"Oh, and I suppose I'm just to believe you!?" Joan cried, sinking to the floor in exhaustion, sobbing.

"Please!" Flynn touched her shoulder. She flinched "Just give her a chance!"

"Why should I?" Joan pointed an accusing finger at Astrid "Why would she keep quiet about something like this? Do you know what this will do to me? To us?"

"I won't tell," Astrid explained, hesitantly crouching down to Joan's level "Because there's something you and I have in common"

Joan shook, the usually proud, strong and determined redheaded woman now appearing to be anything but.

"And wha's tha' then?" she whispered. Astrid gave a weak smile and reached out to take Joan's hand. She made to pull away but Astrid held fast until Joan met her gaze. She gave the hand a squeeze.

"Neither of us wants this marriage to go ahead. So let's stop it.  
Together. Damn the consequences."

End  
file.